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Star Wars – Escape to Myth

Star Wars – Fuga para o Mito

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palavras-chave

A Guerra das Estrelas, saga, género cinematográfico, mito, personagens arquetípicas /arquétipos, ficção-científica, space-opera, Western.

Resumo

Esta tese propõe-se a procurar explicações para a popularidade da saga de filmes levando em linha de conta o contexto cultural e histórico no qual *A Guerra das Estrelas* encontrou a sua génese. Desde os primeiros anos de vida do mentor da saga, George Lucas, fontes de inspiração para a série de filmes são exploradas, e ligações são estabelecidas com outros objectos culturais previamente existentes ou posteriores à saga.

Premissa central a esta tese é a de que *A Guerra das Estrelas* veicula, por parte do seu autor uma leitura alternativa à história recente dos Estados Unidos, particularmente à participação norte-americana na guerra do Vietnam. O caminho proposto foi o do Mito como fator regenerador.

Seguindo a uma abordagem teórica relativa ao contributo de diferentes disciplinas para o estudo do Mito tais como antropologia, história, psicologia, religião, semiologia ou sociologia; é abordada a forma como são endereçadas política e ideologia na saga de filmes.

Uma análise relativa ao género cinematográfico, tendo em consideração a fluidez do conceito, ajuda a identificar a saga de filmes como transcendendo género, englobando elementos relativos à ficção-científica, ao Western ou mesmo à telenovela.

O derradeiro capítulo discrimina personagens arquetípicas (heróis, vilões e mentores) que fortalecem o argumento de que a saga de filmes alcançou o estatuto de mito na sociedade contemporânea.

keywords

Star Wars, saga, cinema genre, myth, archetypal characters, science-fiction, space-opera, Western.

abstract

This thesis aims to search for explanations for the popularity of the saga of films taking into consideration the cultural and historical background in which *Star Wars* had its genesis. From the early years in the life of its creator, George Lucas, sources of inspiration for the space opera are explored, and connections to other previously exiting or posterior cultural objects are made.

Central to this thesis is also the idea that *Star Wars* elicits on behalf of its creator an alternative reading of recent American history, particularly of the Vietnam War. The route proposed was that of Myth as a significant healing factor.

Following a theoretical approach to the contribution of different subjects to the study of Myth such as anthropology, history, psychology, religion, semiology or sociology; the way ideology and politics are addressed in the *Star Wars* saga are the focus of attention and study.

An analysis of film genre, bearing in mind the fluidity of the concept, helps to identify this saga of films as transcending genre, encompassing elements from science-fiction, to the Western or even soap opera.

The final chapter discriminates archetypal characters (heroes, villains, mentors) who are consistent with the argument that the saga of films has itself achieved the status of influential myth in contemporary society.

Star Wars – Escape to Myth

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Introduction

Stemming from the imagination of George Lucas, the *Star Wars* saga has rightfully occupied its place in popular culture, reaching different generations and inviting several approaches as to the interpretations it evokes. Whether it succeeds in appealing to our own personal taste is perhaps of little consequence when compared to the weight it has managed to acquire over the past thirty-five years in the popular imagination of audiences around the world. In this thesis I propose to study its sources and the cultural influence that the *Star Wars* phenomenon has had in popular culture and the reasons for its endurance in the pantheon of cinema blockbusters, as one of the most profitable film franchises of all time.

George Lucas has constructed his story from such distinct fountains of inspiration as religion, mythology, politics and escapist adventure; he has given us dynamic action sequences, striking special effects and memorable storytelling. He is the first to admit that the target audience that he had in mind when he created *Star Wars* were children “I wanted to make a film for kids that would strengthen contemporary mythology.” (Windham, 2010: 7). It is my personal belief that *Star Wars* can be seen, from a certain perspective, to occupy a particularly significant place in today’s society. The all too familiar scroll of the introductory text at the beginning of *Star Wars*: “A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far away...” being the equivalent to a modern day fairy tale starting with “once upon a time...” once again reinforces Lucas’s statement that we are entering a realm of fairytale and folk tale, so popular among younger generations.

I propose explore the history of North America in the 70’s while attempting to speculate on the general state of mind of the American people in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, and by following Lucas’s cues, in the way he chooses to tell his story, understand how he tries to disseminate reassuring, conservative moral values and in the process create his own populist mythology.

With the advent of cinema, the way stories are passed on from generation to generation has become much more graphical. Books appeal to the readers’ imagination in a way that films do not. The visual stimulus film provides gives audiences a much more direct approach to the story. One can argue that this phenomenon leaves much less to the imagination than reading does, but society, globally speaking, has become much more fast-

paced, and audiences tend to seek cultural products which can be absorbed rapidly and viscerally.

Star Wars has invented iconic visual references which have subsisted as pop landmarks in society for over thirty-five years now. From landscapes such as the desert planet of Tatooine, home of the hero of the first trilogy of films Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), reminiscent of the frontier so dear to the American collective consciousness; to the icy planet of Hoth, stronghold of the rebels always on the run from the relentless agents of the Empire; or Dagobah, the marshland world where Jedi master Yoda found refuge after the downfall of the Republic and the rise of the Galactic Empire, a political regime conceived by the Machiavellian, scheming figure of Emperor Palpatine, the saga's ultimate villain.

Lucas drew inspiration from several different sources. Here I hope to establish the connections which made it possible for this group of films to deal with subjects which appear familiar to our collective psyche as well as to establish the symbolic parallels with real world events and dilemmas. I also hope to show that one of the reasons for the success of *Star Wars* lies in the storytelling itself. The story which is being told here is far from original in its overall shape, in its use of archetypal characters such as the hero, the princess in distress, the villain, the hero's mentor, or his friend, even in its approach to the eternal battle of good against evil. The archetypal plot of the hero's journey, quest or mission is common to several stories. However *Star Wars* does offer an original ensemble of these well-known elements, which has made it possible to remain as popular among present generations of audiences as it was with its original fans.

Ultimately I hope to prove that the story devised by George Lucas is still very much alive and developing, due to a regular and astute revisiting of the original project by the filmmaker, whether through comic books, novels, video games or television series. Indeed, Lucas's universe has so often been recreated that it has become the most profitable franchise in the history of cinema.

Chapter I: Lucas's biography and early body of work.

George Lucas: the man behind the story

George Walton Lucas, Jr. was born on May 14th 1944 in Modesto, California. Being born into a suburban family with two older sisters aged eight and ten (Katherine and Ann), he was regarded by his father as the male heir to the family business, which had begun to blossom (George Lucas Senior had started working at a local stationery store called L.M. Morris, Stationers; the owner was so impressed by Lucas Sr.'s diligence he later on proposed partnership to him). However, George's mother Dorothy showed signs of failing health, which caused frequent hospitalizations and long recovery periods so he often felt depressed and anxious about his mother's disease.

This situation caused him to form a special relationship with Mildred Shelley, a housekeeper, familiarly known as Till (who was hired only eight months after George was born) and tended him as if he were her own child. Dale Pollock, in his unauthorized biography of Lucas, establishes a parallel between George Lucas and Winston Churchill derived from the fact that both were "strongly influenced by a substitute mother". In fact "they were both raised by their nannies, not their parents" (Pollock, 1990: 15). What is interesting, for me, is that this feature is shared by the protagonist of the *Star Wars* saga, Luke Skywalker who is raised by his uncle Owen and his aunt Beru, having only a very general and indeterminate notion of who his father was, and no idea at all concerning his mother.

Ten years after George was born, his father agreed to buy a TV set for the family dwelling. This decision proved influential for young George for it expanded the already prolific imagination of the boy, mostly fuelled until then by radio shows and comic strips. One of his childhood inspirations was the Flash Gordon comic strip and later the movie serials featuring the same character among others. Lucas would later endeavor to buy the movie rights to shoot a *Flash Gordon* picture, but those efforts would eventually prove fruitless, but which would lead to him to devise his own set of characters and events that the world would later know as *Star Wars*.

The youth reportedly devoured a vast array of programs on television from *Perry Mason* to Westerns, and innumerable cartoons. One of his favorite shows was “Adventure Theatre”, with its fast-paced action and non-stop visuals; these characteristics would find their way into Lucas’s shooting of his films. Pollock notes that “...his attention to graphic design stems from years of watching TV commercials; so does his reliance on fast pace, action peaks, and visual excitement rather than content.” (Pollock, 1990: 17) In fact the vertiginous pace with which the story is told throughout *Star Wars* testifies to the childhood impatience which would cause him to lose interest if the show he was following on TV didn’t deliver the promised adrenaline rush he so much desired. The filmmaker discovered that the way to guarantee the rush he so avidly craved when he was young was through editing. Lucas’s personal taste for action adventure with an escapist bent and his desire to share the feeling he once nurtured as a member of the audience of childhood TV serials caused him to develop his own “space opera”.

Detractors of *Star Wars* will often point to the relative unimportance of the actors in the films, and even the actors themselves often criticized the dialogue from the films. Lucas however admits that though he’s learnt a lot from his film mentor Francis Ford Coppola, from the time of his running the American Zoetrope film production company, working with actors isn’t one of his strong points. He admits to being much more comfortable with the technical aspect of setting up and editing his films.

Lucas spent his early school years relatively uninterested in his classes, his enthusiasm however shifting from music to photography and eventually to driving. Owning his first car at the age of 15, a Fiat Bianchina convertible with a two-cylinder engine (even before he had a driver’s license) really proved a liberating experience for him. He was capable of escaping from his parents’ ranch on the outskirts of Modesto and joining his friends in the residential neighborhood where Lucas spent the first years of his life. As a teenager he frequently dreamed of becoming a professional car racer. Once again it is interesting to point out the parallel to Luke’s life, when he feels stranded in Tatooine at the beginning of *Star Wars* and continually asks his uncle Owen for permission to enroll in the Academy, a way of bringing some long-sought-after adventure into his life. Uncle Owen, on the other hand, seems to personify adult risk-aversion, which Lucas was less than eager to embrace when he refused to take up the family business. Much to his father’s disapproval, George Lucas discovered that his future professional expectations were quite

different. The theme of heroic confrontation stems in the films, in more ways than one might at first apprehend, from parental opposition. For sure, the title of the film points to *War*, but generational values and conflicts seem more marked in the narrative, particularly when Luke appears to follow in his father's footsteps by becoming a pilot, and not a farmer for the rest of his life, as his uncle would have him do.

Lucas's earlier films

The filmmaker's love for cars and of "cruising" the streets of Modesto is quite patent in one of his earlier works, *American Graffiti* (1973). The film draws its inspiration directly from Lucas's experience. He says. "...[cruising] is a significant event in the maturation of American youth. It's a rite of passage, a mating ritual." (Lucas, *The Making of American Graffiti*). Pollock points out that *American Graffiti* works on two different levels, both as a film about kids having fun and just hanging out but also as an "anthropological statement about American culture" (Pollock, 1990: 29). The nostalgic tone the film adopts proved a profitable one for Lucas, its box office results making it possible for his space saga to come into being. "*Graffiti* proved to be the most profitable film investment a Hollywood studio ever made" (Pollock, 1990: 123). With a budget of roughly \$775,000 and another \$500,000 spent for prints, advertising and publicity, the film brought Universal studios \$55,886,000 in film rentals, the portion of ticket sales returned to the distributor (Pollock, 1990: 123). The film has sold over \$117 million in tickets throughout the world and established Lucas as a filmmaker on whom Hollywood studios could bet their money.

On June 12th, 1962 Lucas was involved on a serious car accident when his Bianchina was rammed broadside by another car as it was about to turn. The car flipped several times and the youngster was lucky to be hurled out of the open roof before the car hit a walnut tree (quite inexplicably his seat belt fixing device snapped as the car flipped over). The accident left George in a critical condition. The crash was significant enough to make a front-page article in the *Modesto Bee*, complete with a picture of the ill-fated car. This proved to be a life-changing experience for Lucas. His relationship to cars most certainly

changed, and his desire to become a race car driver was abandoned after the near fatal accident. The youngster's brief glimpse of his own mortality changed his life forever. Having had to spend a fortnight in hospital gave him time to dwell on the moment. It gave him purpose; he became more aware of his own feelings and learned to trust his instincts (this issue would later be decisive in the development of his space opera project, *Star Wars*). It was at that time that he decided he had to make an effort to enroll in college.

The accident didn't cause Lucas to completely lose interest in car racing; instead he embraced the task of filming the races instead of physically taking part in them. This eventually led him to realize that movies were a compelling "medium of expression" (Pollock, 1990: 35). The next logical step was to enroll in a college in which his natural talent could be further developed. The University of Southern California served this purpose perfectly. The decision actively to pursue a career in the movie business wasn't to the liking of George Lucas Sr. who firmly believed such a career to be a waste of his son's time. The arguments which followed reportedly lasted for years. Similar tensions are displayed between Luke and his uncle Owen, and later with his father; Vader. In a subsequent section of the thesis I will further analyze the nature of this relationship and the change the characters go through.

In real life, Lucas had to find a mentor himself if he was to thrive in the movie business. That figure emerges in the person of Francis Ford Coppola, in Lucas's own words: "You attach yourself to somebody older and wiser than you, learn everything they have to teach, and move on to your own accomplishments." (Pollock, 1990: 37).

Emerging from the car accident with strengthened willpower, Lucas was determined to become a filmmaker at the University of Southern Carolina. Even if he was strongly discouraged by his family and friends, his mind was nevertheless set. After having completed two years at Modesto Junior College studying anthropology, he enrolled at USC at the age of twenty. There he was completely immersed in the world of cinema. Pollock states that Lucas became a strong believer in the "director as the major creative force behind the film" (Pollock, 1990: 46), this notion is intimately related to the *auteur* theory, which originated in the French New Wave of the 1960's and which "credits the director with the ultimate authorship of a film"(Pollock, 1990: 46).

However fervently he defended this theory, time has proven it was ill applied in relation to his own body of work. Neither *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) nor *Return of*

the Jedi (1983) were directed by him. The first was directed by Irvin Kershner and the second by Richard Marquand. Lucas's name figures only in the *Empire's* film's credits as the executive producer and as being responsible for the original story which inspired Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan's screenplay. In *Jedi* he is credited with being the executive producer and also with writing the screenplay, together with Lawrence Kasdan. Both films have become known to larger audiences for being vehicles for Lucas's imagination and not as the creative offerings of their directors.

Lucas, ever meticulous and work-driven, had no problem whatsoever with such technical aspects of filmmaking like shooting footage and later editing; however the role of directing (working with actors and other members of the film crew) was something altogether different. The often strenuous work, particularly with *Star Wars* in Elstree Studios, Borehamwood, England left him both physically and mentally drained, so much so that after finishing directing *Star Wars*, it took twenty-two years before he would direct another film, *The Phantom Menace*, (1999), the first prequel to the original trilogy of the *Star Wars* saga. He has since then assumed the role of director in both *Attack of the Clones* (2002) and *Revenge of the Sith* (2005). Even in recent years his uneasiness at working with actors was often disguised by the maintaining of a rapid narrative pace. Similar fast-pacing can be found in comic books and movie serials which have proven so influential in the development of the filmmaker's particular style. At USC Lucas understood the importance of the technical aspects of cinema, notably editing. He is reported to have spent hours in the editing room and to this day stresses the importance of editing above that of writing or directing in terms of the control over the final product. Nevertheless Pollock points out that Lucas's editing skills were in a way a compensation he discovered for the fact that he wasn't really good at writing (Pollock, 1990: 54). Peter Lev in *American Films of the 70's: Conflicting Visions* also acknowledges the director's style as a way of dealing with his limitations concerning actors: "Lucas is not a particularly gifted director of actors, but his control of "editing" and "pace" creates a feeling of "pure kinetic energy" which has become a part of the world's visual imagination" (Lev, 2000: 167).

It was in fact the editing that appealed to Steven Spielberg when he first saw Lucas's student films. He immediately recognized the talent and uniqueness in his colleague. "George makes his visuals come to life with montage" (cited in Pollock, 1990: 54). The relationship between the two filmmakers would eventually be a long and fruitful one. Irwin

Kershner, on the other hand, isn't as quick to give credit to Lucas for his editing. He considers it a lack of trust in audiences on the filmmaker's part. "He's afraid they'll get bored, so he'll cut a little too fast" (Pollock, 1990: 55).

The filmmaker was responsible for several student and short films such as *Look at Life* (1965); *Herbie* (1966); *1:42:08* (1967); *The Emperor* (1967); *Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town* (1967); *6-18-67* (1967); *Filmmaker* (1968), but there was one film in particular which has subsequently become the focus of general attention: *THX 1138: 4EB (Electronic Labyrinth)*.

THX 1138: 4EB (Electronic Labyrinth) won first prize at the 1967 Third National Student Film Festival. Rumored to having been voted by the jury to win all the competitions which he entered (dramatic film with *THX 1138: 4EB (Electronic Labyrinth)*; documentary with *The Emperor* and experimental works with *6-18-67*), Lucas ended up winning only the dramatic prize and getting honorable mentions for the other two categories. The film had a truly innovative character. It had computer graphics and numbers running across the bottom of the screen. The desire to escape an anaesthetizing environment is a theme already present in his early work, a theme that will resurface in the urge Luke demonstrates to abandon Tatooine in *Star Wars*. In this case, THX, the lead character, stages a dramatic escape from a future emotionless society. The strength of the film resides in the will of the lead character to flee from a highly mechanized society into which he does not seem to fit. Lucas took upon himself the responsibility of editing the film, which accounts for its frenetic pace and also its establishment of a feeling of pursuit. As Pollock puts it, "it wasn't brilliantly absorbing drama, but the whole sense of paranoia and freedom in a bleak, uncertain future was very, very impressive" (Pollock, 1990: 68). *THX 1138: 4EB (Electronic Labyrinth)* managed to impress not only faculty members and fellow students, but also Hollywood.

Lucas's first full-length feature film *THX-1138*: Whose bleak future?

Lucas had become an administrative assistant to Francis Ford Coppola (who had assumed the role of cinematic mentor to him and others) so he had first-hand contact with

Hollywood. Coppola encouraged him to work on the script for a film based on his much acclaimed student film. It was eventually to become *THX 1138*, a full length feature film which was released on March 11th 1971 by Warner Bros. The film featured Francis Ford Coppola as executive producer, and Lucas was responsible for directing, editing and the screenplay (together with sound engineer, Walter Murch). Another interesting detail is that the film featured music by Lalo Schiffrin, best known for his *Mission Impossible* title theme. However, this cinematic experience turned out somewhat bitter for the young director because, upon its release, five minutes were cut from Lucas's original version. This episode would cause Lucas to distance himself from Hollywood and procure means by which he would ultimately be in complete control of his films. Such a determination would prove one of the reasons for the success of the *Star Wars* saga. The fact that the end product remained faithful to the author's conception, and did not compromise his creative talent because of deadlines, money or administrative choices proved critical for Lucas.

THX 1138 had difficulty winning over the general public due to its bleak representation of a dehumanized future in which people were forced to use drugs in order to keep their feelings under control and had their every action continuously scrutinized. The general feeling of the film is unsettling. Even the presence of rising star Robert Duvall and confirmed talent Donald Pleasance weren't enough to captivate audiences. Pollock emphasizes that "THX is Lucas's most complex film, his one attempt at a "message" picture that he hoped would induce people to take some measure of their own lives" (Pollock, 1990: 93). The filmmaker's concerns for the ever complicating relationship between men and machines, his desire to escape a highly restrictive environment (drawing inspiration perhaps from his own personal experience) and the moral implications that one must face the consequences of one's own actions and accept responsibility for them are themes that will permeate his work, resurfacing in *Star Wars*.

One cannot help but read the plot of this film in the broader context of American society in the late sixties and early seventies. THX's running away represents Lucas's protest against a repressive society, his way of saying a person can't be forced to submit to the general ideology of a deeply coercive society, one can just "walk away". This idea contradicts the notion that George Lucas is an apolitical filmmaker, concerned only about entertaining his audiences. In fact one of the criticisms often thrown at Lucas's body of work is that it doesn't attempt to capture the features of everyday life. "...he excludes the

real world from his films, opting instead for harmless fantasy” (Pollock, 1990: 94). There are many ways of expressing dislike for a particular aspect of society, creating fantasy worlds being one of them, but there are, in fact, usually multi-layered readings one can derive from any cultural object. A text can never be interpreted *statically*; it is penetrated by outside influences which stem either from other fictions or from contemporary social issues. The rebels’ plight against the dictatorship of the Galactic Empire ruled by the ruthless Emperor Palpatine can be read as a plea for greater democracy. The theme of the death of democracy and the rise to power of a totalitarian regime is further explored in the most recent trilogy, drawing inspiration from so many political regimes which have risen to power all over the world in the last few years. If in the original trilogy Emperor Palpatine is shown as a figure who suffers no transformation, who is quite literally the embodiment of evil, in the prequel trilogy we get an exact notion of how Chancellor Palpatine of the planet of Naboo came to occupy the position of Supreme Chancellor, finally to abolish what was deemed the Republic and to constitute the first Galactic Empire. In the words of Queen Amidala in *Revenge of the Sith*, “So this is how democracy dies, with thunderous applause!”

Audiences’ responses to *THX 1138* taught Lucas a valuable lesson. If he really wanted to connect with them, he wouldn’t be able to do so by telling a bleak, negative story. Instead he needed positive tales which would immediately resonate with the viewers’ tastes and expectations. There was enough bleakness going around in real life in the mid and late 1970’s, what audiences wanted when they went to the cinema was to feel good about themselves after having watched a film, not depressed and with a sense of paranoid persecution. And in doing so he might just possibly have discovered a way of changing some minds and expressing some of his own moral ideals which seemed somewhat opposed to those regarded as valid at that time in society. This epiphany would influence the rest of his body of work. Not that we get the feeling that Lucas is preaching when he’s telling us one of his tales; what he does have is a strong moral compass (something which seemed to be lacking in society - remember that America in the 70’s after the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, the first oil crisis and hyper-inflation were causing Americans to rethink their position in the world of international politics as well as the notion of social justice at home).

American Graffiti: Recapturing America's lost sense of carefree youth

For his next feature film Lucas dug deep into his adolescent memories and recollected what life was like for him as a teenager in Modesto. His most esteemed memory was that of “cruising”. For Lucas it was a way of capturing a tradition which was disappearing fast among the young people of the 70's in the USA. At the time younger generations were showing their political alienation from the government of the day. It was a way for him to leave a personal documented impression of a tradition which had almost become extinct. He chose to shoot *American Graffiti* in a realistic style, featuring diegetic and non-diegetic music which at the time was unheard of in film.

The slogan for advertising the film (Where were you in 62?) is an example of the kind of nostalgic appeal to the recent past the filmmaker is trying to convey. Lucas made a conscientious effort to rid himself of the image of a cold and distant filmmaker, concerned only with exploring the technical aspects of film and completely disregarding the human factor in his creations. He was responding to Coppola's challenge to do something “warm and fuzzy” after his cold, bleak vision of a dehumanized future in *THX 1138*.

Thus *American Graffiti* (1973) came to be a teenage comedy of the 60's, in which four friends spend their time in a small town, having as much fun as they can. Not surprisingly, the action focuses on romantic and motoring entanglements, this description not necessarily corresponding to the order of importance of the two in the characters' minds. Cars had always played an important part in the young filmmaker's life; were it not for the serious accident he suffered, Lucas might have pursued more actively his dream of becoming a race pilot. Once again present in the film is the relationship between man and machine, in this case the genuine devotion the characters feel for their cars. Toad (Charles Martin Smith), at a certain point in the film, finds himself with a female companion on the outskirts of town and, hoping to get to know her a lot better after choosing to lay on the grass with a blanket he'd found on the back seat of the car, discovers that his car has been stolen when he's been otherwise occupied. This discovery causes him to wail: “Oh, my God! Not the car! Anything but the car!” This is not very flattering for his female companion, Debbie (Candy Clark) but symptomatic of his priorities.

Another theme present in the film is young people's connection to the DJ Wolfman Jack, as they listen to him while they are "cruising" in their cars. It reflects the young's deep-seated need for mature guidance (which they can't get from orthodox channels, at school, home, etc.). So addressed in the film is the irrational way people relate to a public figure, considering him a personal friend. This issue remains absolutely up to date in our society where *persona* and personality are frequently confused, and where many powerful allegiances are expressed towards virtual and symbolic figures.

But perhaps the most important theme, one which dominates *THX 1138*, *American Graffiti* and *Star Wars*, is that of the main character who is put in a situation where he is forced to leave, to experience change and consequently to evolve as a human being. Different versions of this dilemma are featured in each of the films, but the fact remains that personal and moral responsibility has to be assumed in each case. Both THX (Robert Duvall) and Luke (Mark Hamill) choose to leave their previous lives; Curt (Richard Dreyfuss) ends up doing the same. Whereas Steve (Ron Howard), who spends a big part of *American Graffiti* saying he is going to leave, and breaking up with his high school sweetheart in the process, he ends up staying and discovering there are other priorities in his life.

Lucas admits an autobiographical inspiration for each one of the four main characters but particularly Curt (Richard Dreyfuss) who goes through the same experience that the director went through when he decided to leave his hometown and study at USC. Toad, the awkward teen with the thick eyeglasses, Steve (Ron Howard) who ends up staying in his hometown, rediscovering that his love for his girlfriend is more important than his academic career and finally John (Paul LeMat), the hotrod-owning jock who ultimately discovers no one gets to stay seventeen forever. Incidentally, this character's name (John Milner) is a tribute to fellow student and filmmaker at USC, and personal friend of Lucas, John Milius, because of his rambunctious personality.

The license plate of the Ford Deuce Coupé, John Milner's ride, sports THX 138 as homage to the director's previous feature film. And another tribute is made, this time to Francis Ford Coppola's first film, in a scene in *American Graffiti* where there is a cinema in the background and on the marquee the featured film is precisely *Dementia 13*. The credits acknowledge Lucas as the film's director and screenplay writer, together with Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck. Francis Ford Coppola is responsible for the production. In

fact, the association with Coppola proved essential for Lucas to get a contract with Universal Pictures after the box office flop *THX* had been. As a way to advertise *American Graffiti*, the studio associated its name with the man so recently responsible for *The Godfather*. Even then, Universal felt doubts about how lucrative the film would prove to be, in spite of it appearing to be a great success with audiences from its very first screening.

Of course no reflection on *American Graffiti* would be complete, however brief, without taking into consideration the importance music plays in the construction of the film. A Rock and Roll soundtrack is present throughout the film, once again reminiscent of the period prior to the British pop invasion of the USA and the protest song movement, a moment in time where music appeared to portray a lot more naiveté. In terms of the technical exploitation of this resource, Lucas showed prescience for today it is quite common to have films incorporate pre-existing music but at that time it was unheard of. It was actually one of the first movies to use music from records. Walter Murch, who was responsible for the film's sound montage and rerecording, acknowledges that the music even acts as a Greek Chorus because it frequently comments on the action (*The Making of American Graffiti* DVD documentary).

The audience was captivated by Lucas's nostalgic approach, lining up in droves to see it. *American Graffiti* actually became one of the most profitable movies ever made considering the return on the money originally spent (the original budget for the film was \$750 000). With his first blockbuster in hand, it was time for Lucas to advance to his next project: *Star Wars*. However there was once again a detail which proved an irritant for the director. The studio insisted that five minutes of *Graffiti* be cut, which amounted to three different scenes. Only after the commercial success of *Star Wars* was Lucas able to negotiate the inclusion of these three scenes in the rerelease of *American Graffiti* on May 26th 1978 (and in subsequent video releases). The success of the film led to a sequel *More American Graffiti* (1979), of which Lucas was the executive producer. Interestingly, one can detect minor similarities to *American Graffiti* in the opening sequence of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008), the jock with his hoodless car, his careless teen companions having fun driving across the desert and begging the driver in the first car of the military convoy to race them. The year is 1957 not 1962, but you also have

Elvis's 1956 version of *Hound Dog* setting the same frantic pace (this song is also used on the *American Graffiti* soundtrack).

***Star Wars* - The beginning of a saga**

Star Wars came into being at a period of turmoil and upheaval in American history. The 70's had seen the unhappy end of U.S. participation in the Vietnam War, many of the atrocities of which had been televised, which caused general consternation among the population, particularly the younger generations. American participation in the Vietnam War shook up the traditional view that the U.S. had the "right of might", people started questioning the morality of the government's actions, especially after the secret bombing of Cambodia and the effects of napalm and Agent Orange became more widely known. *Star Wars* represented a boost in morale for American adults who felt "national honor impaired by the Vietnam experience" (Kapell, 2006: 7).

Stephen P. McVeigh in the chapter "The Galactic Way of Warfare" which can be found in *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise. Fans, Merchandise and Critics* edited by M. Kapell and J.S. Lawrence, points out "the central trope, the engine that drives the narrative of the trilogies [is] war" (Kapell, 2006: 35), consequently we should consider the unequal forces of the two sides featured in this war. On one side, we have the powerful, technologically advanced entity (The Galactic Empire) being challenged and ultimately defeated by an inferior, under-equipped, and often untrained force (the Ewoks in *Return of the Jedi*, or the Gungans in *The Phantom Menace* are good examples of this situation). Even faced with overwhelming odds the rebels manage to triumph. When drawing a parallel with history, one is faced with the Vietnam War where the less equipped and trained of the two forces ultimately triumphed. Lucas's narrative chooses the under-equipped and under-strength side to act as the heroes in this asymmetric warfare, thus by implication giving back to the American public the sense of moral virtue so painfully lost. McVeigh further explores U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War as having a corrosive effect on two myths which are in fact central in American culture: the myth of the Frontier, epitomizing feelings of imposing order on nature, idealism, self-reliance and ultimately

freedom; and the myth of the superpower, derived directly from the onset of the Cold War and which recognizes the huge military might that the U.S. had, enabling it to shape the world to its own design. (Kapell, 2006: 39) If the first myth is at risk because of the different, competing political ideologies of liberation, the second is utterly destroyed. America's superior military strength proved insufficient to defeat an enemy who showed such steadfast resolve (the North Vietnamese ultimately felt they were fighting a tyrant who was intent in robbing them of their freedom and sovereignty).

The business end of *Star Wars*

1st May 1977 is the date which marks the first public screening of *Star Wars* in San Francisco's Northpoint Theatre. It would take three more years for *The Empire Strikes Back* to debut at the Odeon in London, on the 20th May 1980 to be more precise, and *Return of the Jedi* was released theatrically on 25th May 1983, in 1002 theatres across the USA. Politicians haven't remained impervious to the popularity of the *Star Wars* phenomenon; in 1980 Jimmy Carter invites Jeng Biao (the president of China) to watch *The Empire Strikes Back*. He was reportedly thrilled to watch the film. Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as "an evil empire" on 8th March 1983, and he even went so far as to name his Strategic Defense Initiative as "Star Wars".

The video rental market was another substantial source of income for Lucas. In the 80's, at the peak of the video rental business, the release of *Star Wars* in a format which allowed it to be seen in the comfort of home was highly anticipated by fans. *Star Wars* was originally available for rental on video cassette on the 27th May 1982 in the two competing formats: VHS and Beta. It quickly became the first video to earn more than \$1 million in rentals. At about the same time, Jack Valenti, the President of the Motion Picture Association of America, spoke in Congress, profoundly concerned about the impact that video cassette recorders would have on the movie industry.

In fact returns from rentals of *Star Wars* rivalled returns from the ongoing theatrical run of the film. 20th Century Fox stipulates in the rental contract that all video cassettes made available to the public are for rental only until 1st September 1982. On that date the

film was released for direct purchase from the consumer and each cassette sold for about \$80. But cassettes had their days numbered for on 12th October in that same year, the first CD player was introduced into the consumer market. In June *Star Wars* was also made available in Laserdisc format.

1982 also sees Lucasfilm launch the pioneering THX sound system, which even today is responsible for the sound in a vast number of pictures. Thus Lucas's reputation as a filmmaker was already being enhanced by his parallel career as technological innovator and media mogul.

Chapter II: The Rediscovery of Myth

The following theoretical background to and understanding of myth and its application to Lucas's work is relevant because I believe myth can be extensively observed throughout the *Star Wars* series of films, shaping its narrative and necessarily putting it in a different light.

As a definition of myth, Segal proposes that it is simply "a story" or more broadly "a belief or credo". Even those theories which propose a symbolical approach to myth consider the "subject matter, or the meaning to be the unfolding of a story" (Segal, 2004: 5). He goes one step further when he establishes that "to qualify as myth, a story, which can of course express a conviction, be held tenaciously by adherents" (Segal, 2004: 6). Left open is the question of historical veracity. Indeed, whether the story is true or not is of little or no consequence, just as long as the people who invest in the myth do so unwaveringly. For Kirk, the word mythology conveys a somewhat dubious meaning "...since it may denote either the study of myths, or their content, or a particular set of myths" (Kirk, 1993: 8). He further states that "Myths can possess significance through their structure, which may unconsciously represent structural elements in the society from which they originate or typical behavioristic attitudes of the myth-makers themselves" (Kirk, 1993: 252).

Roland Barthes considers myth to be a particular type of speech, which obviously conveys a message, not any type of speech, but one in which language acquires special conditions. Nowadays, Barthes states anything can be imbued with a mythical condition, "since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse." (Barthes, 1993: 109). In this manner, it would be impossible to distinguish myth according to its subject-matter, but instead according to the way this message is conveyed.

When confronted with the problem of the (im)mortality of myths, Barthes argues that "one can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones for it is human history which converts reality into speech and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language." (Barthes, 1993: 110). Mythic discourse is selected by historical context, it is not spontaneously generated. The forms of speech used to convey mythical significance (whether they are books, images or films, for example) presuppose former knowledge, thus

a "...signifying consciousness that one can reason with them while discounting their substance" (Barthes, 1993: 110).

Myth and Semiology

Barthes uses Sausurre's science of signs, which is semiology, to explain the concept of mythology. Semiology is a science of forms for it studies significations apart from their particular contents, "...any semiology postulates a relation between two terms a signifier and a signified" (Barthes, 1993: 112). There is however a third term which expresses a correlation between signifier and signified, and that is sign "the associative total of the first two terms" (Barthes, 1993: 113). A mythological system is constructed from a previously existing semiological system; it assumes the role of a latent or "second-order" semiological system, "where the sign from the first system becomes a mere signifier in the second" (Barthes, 1993: 114). In myth the linguistic system represents the first semiological system, it is appropriated to construct myth itself which Barthes calls a *metalanguage*, one which speaks about the first one (Barthes, 1993: 115). Semiologists acknowledge both writing and pictures as signs as they are read in the light of myth, they both constitute a language-object. The signifier can be seen either as the final term of the linguistic system or the first term of the mythical system. Barthes chooses to call it "meaning" reporting to the first system and "form" reporting to the second. For the term of signified he chooses to use "concept" in the mythical system and the third term is "signification" because "...myth has a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us" (Barthes, 1993: 117).

Barthes continues that "...myth is a type of speech defined by its intention [...] much more than by its literal sense[...]; and that in spite of this its intention is somehow frozen, purified, eternalized, *made absent* by this literal sense" (Barthes, 1993: 124). He goes on to state that the mythical significance is very arbitrary; "it is always in part motivated and unavoidably contains some analogy" (Barthes, 1993: 126). The contribution of semiology to the study of myth is that it "has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (Barthes, 1993:

142). Myth fuses the images provided to it by historical occurrence and produces a “natural” image of this reality.

Myth - origin, function and subject matter.

Several theories have focused their attention on the study of myth. Whether sociological, anthropological or psychological, these theories seem to have something in common: the questions they ask. When studying myth, one must consider the questions of origin, function and subject matter. Origin reports to why and how myth arises. Function is dedicated to the study of why and how myth endures. It is commonly argued that there is “a need that myth arises to fulfill and lasts by continuing to fulfill” (Segal, 2004: 2). Finally the subject matter represents the referent of myth. Depending on the linearity with which myth is read, the referent can be either straightforward or symbolical. When theory understands myth symbolically, almost anything can be the symbolized referent.

Segal continues to outline the commonly-held differences between nineteenth century theories of myth and twentieth century ones. The first established the primary focus of their attention on the question of origin, while the later explored more fully the questions of function and subject matter. (Segal, 2004: 3). Nineteenth century theoretical approaches seemed to have considered the subject matter of myth as the physical world and its function as a mere explanation of reality. Thus myth was seen as a “primitive counterpart to science” (Segal, 2004: 3). A scientific approach would therefore make myth not only redundant but absolutely incompatible with its own quest to explain the world. Later theories seem to have bridged the gap between myth and science. If myth is considered from the perspective of explaining the world around us, it will probably be more consistent with a society which isn’t dominated by a scientific worldview. However if myth is seen as a way to unify society, it may very well coexist with science, and even strengthen it. When Charles Darwin proposed his theory of the evolution of species his scientific approach clashed with former creationist mythological theories. Still, even nowadays, creationism has its enthusiasts, who render in a literal way the bible’s account of creation. They consider their viewpoints as both scientific and religious, not just faith-

based, religious *per se*. They use a (pseudo)scientific approach to validate their beliefs as well as to refute Darwin's theory of the evolution of species, that is, "...creationism is a myth that claims to be scientific" (Segal, 2004: 12)

But, generally speaking, the rise to social hegemony of science proposes a considerable challenge for both religion and myth; the question which can be raised is not about the scientific accuracy and credibility of myth, but about the viable coexistence of myth and science. If myth is considered as a part of religion "the rise of science as the reigning modern explanation of physical events has consequently spelled the fall not only of religion but also of myth" (Segal, 2004: 13). Myth might prove to be a "victim of the process of secularization that constitutes modernity" (Segal, 2004: 13)

The anthropologist E.B. Tylor deems myth irreconcilable with science for "the explanations that myth and science give are incompatible" (Segal, 2004: 17), they both try to explain the same events the first using a personalistic explanation and the second an impersonal one. He considers myth as belonging to societies which are more primitive while science is a trait of modern societies; in this way, he establishes a discrete "myth-making stage" of culture (Segal, 2004: 18), thus failing to acknowledge myth as an enduring phenomenon, as Mircea Eliade, C.G. Jung or Joseph Campbell do. His assertion of myth as a set of literal/historical affirmations, as opposed to a symbolical or metaphorical explanation, also contributes to his opposing of myth to science.

Close to Tylor's conception of myth stands Scottish anthropologist J.G. Frazier's theory, which also considers myth as a part of primitive religion. However, their theories have met with some interesting resistances, one of them being the fact that even nowadays, in an era of science, myth has managed to maintain its initial appeal for a significant number of people. It is in this context that Hans Blumenberg advances the notion that "the survival of myth alongside science proves that myth has *never* served the same function as science" (Segal, 2004: 24)

Bronislaw Malinowski, deems myth as a way for "primitives [to] seek to control nature rather than to explain it." (Segal, 2004: 27). For this Polish anthropologist, primitive people rely on myth as a fallback to science. "Primitives use [a rudimentary form of] science as a way to control the physical world, when science fails, they turn to magic" (Segal, 2004: 28). When magic reaches its physical limits, primitives turn to myth as a way to understand and overcome (or, at least, come to terms with) physical phenomena which

cannot be controlled by them, like for example natural disasters, or the process of ageing and ultimately death. Kirk states that Malinowski detects “the prime function of myth as the recording and validating of institutions, and in totally rejecting their speculative aspects” (Kirk, 1993: 7).

Claude Lévi-Strauss considers myth as “an exclusively primitive, yet nevertheless rigorously intellectual, enterprise” (Segal, 2004: 29). For the French structural anthropologist the creation of myth by primitive peoples establishes them as thinking differently from modern peoples. They think in a concrete way as opposed to more modern thought, which tends to be more abstract. For Lévi-Strauss myth represents the “epitome of primitive thinking” (Segal, 2004: 29). Kirk states that for Lévi-Strauss “...all myths are speculative, or problem reflecting, when properly understood.” (Kirk, 1993: 7).

The Austrian philosopher Karl Popper advances the concept that “science emerges out of myth” (Segal, 2004: 33). However this emergence does not result in the acceptance of its predecessor; rather the opposite, it results in its criticism. “By “criticism” Popper means not rejection but reassessment, which becomes scientific when it takes the form of subjection to attempts to falsify the truth claims made” (Segal, 2004: 33). It is then possible to have both scientific and religious myths, the difference residing not in their content but in the dogmatic attitude which customarily accompanies it in the case of religious myths, as opposed to a questioning attitude which is appropriate for scientific myths.

Myth and religion

Science has often been seen as a contrasting way of envisioning the world to that of religion. Therefore if myth tends to share many of the views and values of theology, it too must suffer the challenges that religion faces. Religious studies have tried to approximate myth to science by “reconciling religion with science” (Segal, 2004: 46). Different ways of understanding myth and religion have been used to escape direct confrontation with science. For one, the subject matter of religion has been argued not to be of the physical world, thus being out of science’s reach; consequently what it argues has previously

happened is that myth has been misconstrued. On the other hand, certain secular phenomena have been elevated to the level of myth, therefore “myth is no longer confined to explicitly religious ancient tales” (Segal, 2004: 46). In this context, it is common to have stories of heroes elevated to mythical proportions.

Rudolf Bultmann deems myth, when taken literally, as “a primitive explanation of the world, an explanation incompatible with a scientific one” (Segal, 2004: 47). However, by establishing a symbolic reading of myth, what he in fact does is to “demythologize” myth. What is intended is “... not eliminating, or “demythicizing”, the mythology but instead extricating its true, symbolic meaning” (Segal, 2004: 47). After this process occurs myth stops being directly related to the world and instead turns out to be about human (subjective) experience of the world instead. “Demythologized, myth ceases to be an explanation at all and becomes an expression, an expression of what it “feels” like to live in the world” (Segal, 2004: 48). In this assertion, myth gains a universal character. Once demythologized, myth is rendered compatible with science.

Unlike Bultman, Mircea Eliade refuses to acknowledge the possibility of reconciling myth with science. From his perspective myth is read literally, considering it an explanation “of the origin of a phenomenon and not just of its recurrence” (Segal, 2004: 54). Having focused his attention on modern and unreligious myths, Eliade considers the simple fact of their present existence an argument for their compatibility with science. “Eliade’s criterion for myth is that a story attributes to its subject a feat so exceptional as to turn its subject into a superhuman figure” (Segal, 2004: 55). Although myth for Eliade means explanation, it also gains a different dimension: that of regeneration. “To hear, to read, and especially to re-enact a myth is magically to return to the time when the myth took place, the time of the origin of whatever phenomenon it explains” (Segal, 2004: 55). For this author, through myth you find God. This quality can never be found in science, for it simply explains reality. It is the quality of regeneration which makes myth so appealing for technologically advanced societies, whose individuals like to declare themselves rational or “scientific” in thought.

Cinema can assume a mythical dimension, for it shows countless heroes in paradigmatic confrontations with villains, maidens who need rescuing, vicious dragons and out of this world landscapes which resonate with previously accredited, personal images of

heaven or hell. “Plays, books, and films are like myths because they reveal the existence of another, often earlier world alongside the everyday one – a world of extraordinary figures and events akin to those found in traditional myths” (Segal, 2004: 56-57). What is more, films enact a dismissal of reality and escape to a world where myth is not only a presence, but a force to be reckoned with. Cinema postulates a world which is ripe with myth in its metaphysical dimension.

Myth and ritual

Another practice to which myth is tied is that of ritual. William Robertson Smith pioneered a myth-ritualistic theory where he “...argues that belief is central to modern religion but not to ancient religion, in which ritual was central” (Segal, 2004: 61). Extrapolating from this notion, we can surmise that in ancient societies myth performed a secondary role because it was dominated by the ritualistic aspect of religion. Myth was immanent in ritual, as in the Catholic Mass; not everyone was required to look beyond the ritual to the explanatory or belief system which supported it. Even if myth played a lesser role, it is directly associated with the concept of ritual. However, J.G. Frazier believes that myth precedes ritual “The myth that gets enacted in the combined stage emerges in the stage of religion and therefore antecedes the ritual to which it is applied.” (Segal, 2004: 66). It is important to notice that for Frazier’s myth-ritualistic theory, there is a division of all cultures into three different central stages. The stages are magic, religion and science, and it is in an intermediate stage of magic and religion where myth-ritualism can be found. When transposing the myth-ritualistic theory to nowadays, one can discover that the movie-going experience can assume a ritualistic character of its own, as do many of the practices of fandom.

Myth and history

Myth-making can also be read as an alternative practice to writing history. Its purpose is not necessarily to rewrite history, but to shape reality into a more appealing or ideologically useful form.

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.

(Barthes, 1993: 143)

It at times offers the consolation of healing from a harsh reality which history frequently strives to represent. It can be perceived as poetic truth, which isn't necessarily tied down by history. Being understood in this manner, myth abolishes a great deal of complexity from human acts and motives. The Manichaeism which can be inferred from this perspective grants human actions the simplicity of essences; such a way of envisioning the world cannot, of course, reflect much depth because it lingers in the notion that "things appear to mean something by themselves" (Barthes, 1993: 143). A famous quote from Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, relating to the appalling dilemma of an Irish artist beset by British colonialism, Irish nationalism and Roman Catholic dogma, illustrates this point: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to wake". The proposed escape route in Joyce's work was a contemporary reworking of myth.

Focusing his attention on the formal aspects of myth, Barthes states that "There is no latency of the concept in relation to the form: there is no need for an unconscious in order to explain myth" (Barthes, 1993: 121). In myth the meaning is distorted by the concept. One of its directives is to impose its meaning on us. "Myth is a *value*, and truth is no guarantee for it, nothing prevents it from being a perpetual alibi: it is enough that its signifier has two sides for it always to have an "elsewhere" at his disposal" (Barthes, 1993: 123). In fact, he continues by saying that "Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion" (Barthes, 1993: 129). Myth converts history into nature and by doing so it deflects the issue of truth. There is a

dogmatic essence which permeates the mythical essence which will not be altered by knowledge or time.

Barthes even goes so far as to consider the “naturalization of the concept” myth’s primary function (Barthes, 1993: 131). He believes that myth is effective, not because its intentions are hidden, but because they are naturalized. Consider, for example, the mythical notion of Aryan supremacy defended by the Nazis, which bore very little historical weight or clarity yet commanded extraordinary acceptance. In the eyes of the myth consumer “the signifier and the signified have [...] a natural relationship” (Barthes, 1993: 131). As previously mentioned, when myth fuses historical reality into a natural image it empties it from its original meaning, “...it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a hemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence” (Barthes, 1993: 143).

The question of whether myth should be deemed realistic or unrealistic is also addressed by Roland Barthes. The language which sustains myth is a form, thus neither realistic nor unrealistic; all it can do is be mythical or not. When taking literature into consideration, one must understand that “the author’s language is not expected to *represent* reality, but to signify it” (Barthes, 1993: 137).

Myth and Psychology

The discipline of psychology has contributed with two main theories to the study of myth; those of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Both seem to align myth with dream. Freud focuses on the myth of Oedipus in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*, establishing two different levels to the story. On the surface, Oedipus’s story describes the inevitability of fate which seems to plague the lead character; however on a latent level this myth hides a symbolic meaning. Latently, Oedipus desires to take the place of his father alongside his mother, and by doing so act out his sexual impulses. “On the manifest level Oedipus is the innocent victim of Fate. On the latent level he is the culprit.” (Segal, 2004: 92). One can establish then that Oedipus’s tale is not that of an innocent who is incapable of escaping the traps fate has set for him, but someone who is successfully fulfilling his most intimate desires.

Still there is an even more latent level for Freud in this myth, for it is not about Oedipus at all. Establishing Oedipus's guilt on the latent level "masks an even more latent level where the real victimizer is the myth-maker and any reader of the myth grabbed by it" (Segal, 2004: 93). Here, myth represents the fulfillment of the Oedipus Complex. For Freud, every male adult has, to some extent, ingrained within him the Oedipus Complex, nevertheless it has been repressed. Being multilayered, myth at the same time hides its true meaning, thereby blocking fulfillment, but also reveals it, thus providing for the possibility of fulfillment. By identifying themselves with the character of Oedipus, adults "secure a partial fulfillment of their own lingering Oedipal desires" (Segal, 2004: 93); this happens in spite of their lack of awareness of their own desires.

Otto Rank, in his Freudian analysis of myth *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1992), founds heroism in the early years of life, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, where a person establishes himself as independent from and autonomous in the world. When someone reads myth he/she identifies her/himself with its hero and therefore "acts out in his mind deeds that he would never dare act out in the world" (Segal, 2004: 98). By acting out in his mind the hero's deeds, the neurotic male is left with an inherent sense of fulfillment. "...myth does provide fulfillment of a kind, in light of the conflict between the neurotic's impulses and the neurotic's morals" (Segal, 2004: 98). Jacob Arlow advances a differing developmental notion when he sees myth as contributing to the normal development of an individual rather than perpetuating neurotic behavior. "Myth abets adjustment to the social and the physical worlds rather than childish flight from them" (Segal, 2004: 98). For this author, myth serves not only to fulfill the wishes of the *id*, instinctual impulses, but also to help perform the functions of the *ego*, namely an adaptation to society and even those of the *superego*.

The myth is a particular kind of communal experience. It is a special form of shared fantasy, and it serves to bring the individual into relationship with members of his cultural group on the basis of certain common needs. Accordingly, the myth can be studied from the point of view of its function in psychic integration – how it plays a role of adaptation to reality and to the group in which the individual lives, and how it influences the crystallization of the individual identity and the formation of the superego.

(Arlow, 1961: 375)

Although, for Arlow, myth serves the purpose of fulfilling wishes on an individual level, it also facilitates integration into a larger group, and in doing so it enables the process of socialization. Bruno Bettelheim believes that fairy tales serve equivalent functions to myths in terms of socialization from those referred to by Arlow. But he believes that “the mythic superego is so unbending that the maturation it espouses is unattainable” (Segal, 2004: 100). He observes the fact that often the heroes of myth are gods, and demigods, who only achieve victory because of their exceptional condition. The situation is reversed in fairy tales where common people are projected into heroic roles, thus inspiring mimicry. This bipartite division for Bettelheim causes fairy tales to be more conducive to psychological growth, for readers can project themselves more clearly into the characters of fairy tales than of mythical ones.

C. G. Jung sees mythic heroism as a relation with the unconscious, therefore more present in the second half of life (contrary to Freud’s theory which limited it to the first half). If in the first half of life heroism represents a child’s separation from its parents or its latent antisocial instincts; in the latter stages of life the ultimate purpose would be to achieve consciousness. However, the consciousness which is desired is that of the unconscious rather than of the external world (maturity here meaning the gaining of self-knowledge). The objective would be to reestablish a connection to the unconscious which has been inexorably cut. But it would also be to recreate such a connection without severing one’s ties to the external world. Myth here would serve the purpose of expressing “normal sides of the personality that have just not had a chance at realization.” (Segal, 2004: 107)

Jung contributes to the study of myth with another notion, which is that of the theory of the “collective unconscious” in which “...all human beings possess similar inborn tendencies to form certain general symbols, and that these symbols manifest themselves through the unconscious mind in myths, dreams, delusions and folklore” (Kirk, 1993: 275). This is an idea which has been enormously influential in the 20th century and in cinema in particular.

Returning to the achievements of heroism, Joseph Campbell offers a different theory, for he places it directly in the second half of a person’s life. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* he reorganizes the classical hero myth paradigm. “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the

rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.” (Segal, 2004: 104). For this author the myth-maker or reader “vicariously lives out mentally an adventure that even when directly fulfilled would still be taking place in the mind” (Segal, 2004: 107). Contrary to Jung, Campbell’s hero never returns to the world of reality; what he aims to achieve is pure unconsciousness. When he returns to the world he has previously left, with power or knowledge he hadn’t previously possessed, he discovers that the world to which he returns is a different one for it is one and the same with the divine world through which the hero has lived his adventure.

The two worlds, the divine and the human, can be pictured only as distinct from each other – different as life and death, as day and night... Nevertheless...the two kingdoms are actually one.

(Campbell, 2012: 217)

These multiple readings of myth, and particularly Campbell’s, provides us with a framework for understanding the why and the what of Lucas’s work.

Chapter III – Politics and Ideology in the *Lucosmos*.

The Force – Spirituality in a distant galaxy

It appears that all the technological might brandished by the Empire is no match for the Force, a spiritual notion, sufficiently vague and undefined to fit any of the religious dogmas propounded by most popular religions and cults the Earth has witnessed. The scorn of the Empire for the Force is palpable in the scene from *Star Wars* where Vader warns one of the officers not to be too proud of the technological terror they have devised for “it is nothing compared to the power of the Force”. When the officer retorts by considering Vader’s devotion to that ancient religion as “pitiful”, Vader is left with no other option but to produce a demonstration of the power of the Force. He begins to choke the officer just by willing it (through the control of the Force). This episode could be analyzed from several different points of view. Firstly, it distinguishes Vader from the rest of the henchmen of the Empire, (if that demarcation hadn’t already been sufficiently clear from the garb sported by the villain). But it also states the author’s perception that technological power alone is void of significance when compared with the power of spirituality. It could be perceived as Lucas’s way of stating that a society which gives too much credit to machinery and not enough to the human factor is ultimately destined to doom. Of course, one should never forget the appeal of technology to Lucas himself. It is not fortuitous that the political regime which governs the galaxy in *Star Wars* uses technology as a way of disseminating terror, its ultimate technological realization being the Death Star, a space station capable of destroying entire planets with its gigantic laser canon. Lucas always filmed using technological breakthroughs as a way of creating a bigger visual impact while telling his space stories. Whether if it was by extensively using CG images in the later trilogy, or building several detailed replicas of space ships or sets in the previous one, Lucas showed his audiences what they had never before seen on such a scale. This faith in technology which the Empire exhibits seems to be consonant with the governing ideology of replacing religion, and consequently myth, for science as a way of explaining the world. However, myth holds its place in Lucas’s story as transcending technology. The Force

cannot be seen or defined, but it exists. It cannot be controlled by untrained minds, but when properly used it can prove a valuable ally. If we consider the mythical dimension of the Force, we must conclude that the Empire seems one dimensional in its unwavering search for the ultimate technological weapon. Vader needs to demonstrate his attunement with the Force because he knows that this myth is real, that is why he proves to be more powerful than any of the other imperial leaders (excluding, of course the figure of the Emperor). In spite of this spiritual awareness of the character and due to the extensive wounds he has suffered in his battle with Obi-Wan in the volcanic world of Mustafar, he is compelled to use protective body armor at all times. He represents a merging of two worlds, one which is in tune with the spiritual world and the mythical notion of the Force and another which deems technology indispensable for maintaining life (without his protective body armor Vader would perish). The figure of Vader has achieved a status of mythical proportions himself; for the people who are governed by fear he is a living symbol of the tyranny of the Empire.

As stated before, the Force finds resonances in several religious texts. For example Taoism derives most of its teachings from the concept of the Balance of the Way. In Taoism you have the concept of yin and yang, the positive and the negative, which complement each other. A similar concept can be seen in the Force, the light side (the road followed by the Jedi) and the dark side (the path of the Sith). Taoist wisdom says “in everything lies the seed of its opposite” (Kapell, 2006: 79). So only after having experienced both sides of the Force can Vader decide the side he wants to be on. In Taoism the wu-wei teaches that action which is not spontaneous be avoided. One should act only according to one’s needs and always do so skillfully. Even when vigorous action is required one must endeavor to refrain from over-strenuous physical effort and channel one’s energies into profitable action. In *The Phantom Menace* epic fight scene where Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) hold off as best as they can the brutal attack of the Sith apprentice Darth Maul (martial arts expert, Ray Park), there is a point where the three contenders get separated by a laser wall which shields them from one another. Qui-Gon’s actions couldn’t be more opposed to those of Darth Maul. The Jedi master is following the Taoist teachings of the wu-wei, biding his time and trying to direct his energy into profitable action. Darth Maul couldn’t be more different; he’s grinding his teeth, practically foaming with anticipation. Unfortunately for the Jedi master

all his Taoist techniques aren't sufficient to withstand the Sith apprentice's attack and he ends up impaled on one of the blades of Darth Maul's double edged lightsaber. But for all his aggressiveness, the latter proves to be no match for Obi-Wan and ultimately is overpowered by him, as he literally gets cut in two and plunges into the abyss. Lucas leaves little room for the imagination of the viewers as he graphically depicts his fall to damnation. Luke also exhibits practical applications of wu-wei teaching as he warns Han and Chewie not to act aggressively against the Ewoks in *Return of the Jedi* (choosing the path of non-violence) and thus being able to secure their participation in the decisive battle against the Empire that takes place later on that moon of Endor.

Star Wars also embraces the Christian struggle of Good versus Evil. The character of Anakin shows some parallels with Jesus Christ. From his immaculate conception (Shmi Skywalker gave birth to Anakin without having had male intervention) to Anakin's uncanny capability to maneuver his race pod, the *Star Wars* equivalent of a Roman chariot, reminiscent of the famous action sequence from the Christian epic, *Ben Hur*, only to be later discovered that it was directly related to his highly developed Jedi reflexes, however evocative of the miraculous this may seem. At a later stage of the story, Vader also postshadows Lucifer as the fallen angel, the one who falls from heaven (the Jedi Order) and quite literally burns in the metaphorical world of Mustafar which clearly symbolizes Hell. His sin was to try to achieve immortality, not for himself but for his loved one, Padmé. As his vision is obscured by the dark side, he is unable to perceive himself as the cause of the destruction of the one he is trying to save.

When Anakin brandishes the two lightsabers in *Attack of the Clones*, one blue and one red one, one can encounter a symbolical dimension consistent with the character's own moral dilemma, the crossroads where he finds himself, being forced to choose between the paths of Good and Evil. (Kapell, 2006: 86), but if there is conflict in the character of Anakin, there is none in the character of Palpatine. He is a "metonym for undistilled evil" (Kapell, 2006: 86). A brief mention must be made of the weapon of choice of Jedi and Sith alike, the lightsaber. In Obi-Wan's words in *Star Wars* it is an ancient weapon for a "much more civilized time". All through mythical tales heroic figures have wielded special weapons. In northern mythology Thor, the god of thunder, son of Odin, brandishes his *mjollnir*, Celtic mythology restores Arthur to his rightful place as king by being able to

remove Excalibur from the stone in which it had been magically embedded. By using such distinctive weapons Jedi knights assume a mythical dimension.

Kapell also reflects on the Buddhist concept of upaya: “the teachings of Buddhism should be disseminated according to the audience’s spiritual, intellectual and moral condition.” (Kapell, 2006: 81). So the teachings of the Force must find different resonating influences in diverse users of the ancient mystical energy. The relationships which can be established between Buddhism and the Force are far from over. For one thing, the name for the lead female character of the later trilogy Padmé Amidala (Natalie Portman) seems reminiscent of the Buddhist mantra “Om Mani Padmettun” (jewel of the Lotus), “the wisdom that can bloom even in the mud of life” (Kapell, 2006: 81). Buddhism advocates an interconnectedness which hopefully will provide a moderating balance in all things, in search for the ultimate solution to the problem of enlightenment. Yoda could be perceived as a bodhisattva, a Buddhist wisdom teacher. The Jedi Order, much like Zen Buddhism, establishes a strong connection between body and mind. It combines the skillful use of body discipline (martial arts and fencing) with a strong emphasis on meditation. Both *Star Wars* and Buddhism maintain the concept of “meditation as a means to regain equilibrium in an unbalanced world.” (Kapell, 2006: 83) Through the use of meditation the Jedi can accomplish extraordinary things such as molding the physical world, developing telekinetic abilities and even summoning up glimpses of the future.

Much like Buddhist monks, the Jedi knights and masters are expected to relinquish the support and security of family “The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism teach that one can overcome suffering through overcoming desire” (Kapell, 2006: 83); they must devote themselves entirely to the Order. Anakin’s greatest flaw is that he isn’t able to overcome his desire, consequently he can’t overcome suffering. There is, of course, the question of his forbidden love for Padmé Amidala, Chancellor of Naboo and its former Queen (in Lucas’s mythology, the kings and queens of that particular planet are elected and stay in office only for a specific period of time). But there is also his unquenchable thirst for power. Anakin hopes to one day achieve the position of the most powerful Jedi who has ever existed and, as previously mentioned, with this hunger for ultimate power comes corruptibility. He epitomizes the “profound suffering that can result from ignorance and imbalance.” (Kapell, 2006: 83). In conclusion, this author stipulates that *Star Wars* exhibits “thematic parallel to Taoism, Buddhism and Christianity with an emphasis on the

importance of balance and recognition of the complexity of human moral experience” (Kapell, 2006: 88). Corruption can therefore be identified, as the main feature of the Galactic Empire.

The Jedi Order could be understood in the light of William Robertson Smith’s myth-ritualistic theory, where for ancient cultures myth played a secondary role, opposed to that of ritual. The Jedi are forced by their order to devote themselves completely to a mission thus relinquishing the option of building a family as mentioned above. The ritual of devoting their lives to becoming a Jedi takes precedence and myth seems to be immanent in the ritual. The characters aren’t required to look beyond the ritual to the explanatory or belief system which supports it. In a more comic vein, the same thing is expected of the *Men in Black* agents, with their mini-lightsabers of forgetting.

Dictatorship in the stars

The Galactic Empire, under the rule of the Machiavellian Emperor Palpatine, is constantly referred to by critics as an allegory of totalitarian political regimes such as Nazism or Communism (take for example the fact that Lucas named the foot soldiers of the Empire Stormtroopers, which was the name Hitler gave to the elite group of soldiers whose task it was to guard him). McVeigh, in his article “The Galactic Way of Warfare”, which can be found in *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise. Fans, Merchandise and Critics*, plays with the notion that the Empire could actually represent a projected version of America itself (Kapell, 2006: 38). How disconcerting it would be if Lucas had intended to represent America as a totalitarian empire aspiring to political hegemony. I prefer to think of him pondering the dangers of such political regimes and making sure that precautionary measures are taken to ensure adequate checks and balances and that ultimately power belongs to the people.

America was confronted in the 1970’s with the Watergate scandal which had recently broken, creating a deep abyss of mistrust between government and the American people. Domestically, prices were rising causing harsher living conditions and harsh realism took root in people’s lives. *Star Wars* undertakes the task of rediscovering and

reimposing a forgotten mythological notion of good vs. evil, and in which good ultimately triumphs.

As Mathew Wilhelm Kapell comments in *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise*: “The film’s distinct new core lay in its mythological template” (Kapell, 2006: 5). Such a template offers the chance to retell stories which have been told before. Using archetypal characters who ultimately share common personality traits and experiences, Lucas manages to emulate life in the popular series of films.

Right at the center of *Star Wars*’s mythological system we find Joseph Campbell’s classical monomyth, which he relates in his book *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*. A personal friend of Lucas, the social anthropologist Campbell managed to influence the director profoundly in the development of his story. The hero paradigm in *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* is restructured into rites of passage which can be considered essential for Campbell’s monomyth. They are: separation, initiation and return. These are roughly the stages Luke has to pass through if he is to achieve heroic status in the *Star Wars* saga. Initiation is the stage which is most comprehensively addressed in the first trilogy; only after Luke faces Vader at the end of *Return of the Jedi* can he truly be considered a Jedi Knight and consequently complete the initiation stage.

In the original trilogy Lucas dwells on classical archetypes. However, in the more recent trilogy, there is an estrangement from this field of interest, leading to a political discourse revealing a higher level of awareness. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why fans of the original trilogy have had a harder time embracing the more recent installments of the saga, particularly *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*. Effecting changes in the dogma which the original trilogy enacted was, for many, a sin which isn’t easily forgiven, even if the person responsible for revisiting the saga was Lucas himself. On the other hand, some of the innocence pertaining to the original saga seems to have been necessarily lost.

Corruptive Power

Lucas draws inspiration from various political systems for his perception of the corruption which comes hand in hand with power. Throughout the *Star Wars* series of

films he expands on the notion that power corrupts, and ultimate power will corrupt ultimately. This premise can be seen most clearly in the figure of Palpatine. The chancellor turned Emperor even goes so far as to become physically disfigured as a result of his battle with the four Jedi knights who are entrusted with the mission of arresting him, after they discover his mysterious identity. One can extrapolate that his disfigurement is a merely physical manifestation of the corruptness which dwells in his soul.

Much like the Chancellor of Naboo, Hitler requested special powers in 1933 so that he could overcome the dire economic situation that Germany was going through following the settlement of World War I. Palpatine manages to seduce Anakin to the dark side by offering him a chance to achieve the sort of power which will even challenge death itself. In *Revenge of the Sith*, while attending an opera performance Anakin confides to Palpatine that in a dream he has seen Padmé dying; the supreme chancellor takes the chance to leave the idea hovering in the air that it is even possible to cheat death, however that sort of power cannot be learnt from a Jedi. Palpatine assumes the role of mentor to Anakin, but in this case the mythic role of mentor assumes a much darker shade, for the scheming figure has his own personal agenda, so his teachings are only a way of conscripting someone who will ultimately be used by him as an enforcer, a weapon and a symbol of tyranny. He is also an emblem of irresistible power. This in part attests to the popularity of the character among younger spectators, because the idea of complete fearlessness is utterly seductive for any child. In this case it is easy to draw a parallel between Palpatine and the Serpent of Eden, which tempted Eve. The forbidden fruit in this case being the teachings of the Sith, which would grant Anakin enough power to save his beloved one. It is fear of losing Padmé which leads Anakin to the dark side, causing him to enter into a Faustian deal of sorts, in which he sells his soul to the devil partly in order to achieve power.

In the end the story of Anakin parallels that of the devil himself, for it captures the story of the fall of one of the most promising Jedi into the abyss. Lucifer, the fallen angel, out of lust for power, pride and arrogance wages war on Heaven. These psychological traits always precede a fall in myth. Once defeated, Lucifer is cast out of heaven and forced to create his own kingdom: Hell. It is not accidental that Obi-Wan and Anakin's final duel in *Revenge of the Sith* takes place on the lava planet of Mustafar, a visual metaphor for Hell. The apocalyptic undertone of this battle mirrors the inner turmoil the character is experiencing. When the two blue lightsabers clash (a visual moment never before seen in

any of the *Star Wars* films, where red is associated with the dark side), the spectators are shown the exact instant that the damnation of Anakin takes place. One can speculate on the color of the lightsaber bearing connotation to the inner conflict Anakin is feeling. Note that in later stages Vader's lightsaber is red, the conflict seems to have subsided, giving place to a sense of submission to his tragic destiny.

As a result of this clash Anakin will sustain severe injuries and be forced to dwell permanently inside his protective armor so as to preserve his life. But his physical injuries are insignificant when compared with the emotional loss Anakin sustains, forever carrying the burden of being directly responsible for the demise of Padme, who poetically dies of a broken heart after giving birth to her twin children, Luke and Leia. Anakin thus perpetually lives in his own personal hell. In the process which he hopes will save Padmé, Anakin loses her, giving form to a new version of a theme often seen in traditional Greek tragedy. The vortex into which he is sucked impels him to do all the wrong things for the right reasons. He is so passionate about his love that in the process of defending it he gets consumed by it.

This parallel which can be drawn from the character of Anakin to that of Lucifer is surprising considering there is another significant equivalence which can be found at the beginning of the later trilogy. In *The Phantom Menace* we learn that Anakin has no biological father, in this way introducing the motif of the virgin birth in his story. The resemblance to the story of Christ is more than an accidental one for Anakin too is predestined to be the savior, the one who will bring balance to the Force. As we can see, the mythical strength of religion flows throughout the series of films. In this case cinema manages to create "a world of extraordinary figures and events akin to those found in traditional myths". (Segal, 2004: 57)

Totalitarian political systems have always been one of the concerns of science-fiction, "Star Wars wasn't the first cultural object to identify the "danger" of a transnational government. Quite a popular theme in the sci-fi stories from 1926 onwards" (Rickman, 2004: 230). In fact Rickman goes on to say that "during the 2nd World War and the following years, the idea of an International World Order continued to grow in the popular imagination" (Rickman, 2004: 231).

The resurgence of the theme in *Star Wars* is a testimony to its currency, drawing inspiration from several historical examples of totalitarian states, from ancient Rome ruled

by the Caesars to Soviet Communism. Lucas introduces the Galactic Empire as a political system based on the dissemination of terror as a way of ruling.

Conservatism in the *Star Wars* universe

In chapter 10 of his book *American Films of the 70's. Conflicting Visions*, entitled "Whose future?" Peter Lev describes *Star Wars* as creating an "ideologically conservative future" (Lev, 2000: 165). For that he establishes that it is "conservative in its ideological underpinnings. Men are active heroes, Princess Leia a damsel in distress, good and evil are clearly separated, and Luke is guided by the benevolent father figure of Obi-Wan Kenobi" (Lev, 2000: 167). If the original films in the *Star Wars* saga do, in fact, have a straight forward narrative, reminiscent of classical fairy tales, the intention of which is to disseminate a conservative ideology, they do however offer some surprising elements of modernity. One of the purposes of myth is to "naturalize the concept" (Barthes, 1993: 131) and by doing so it disseminates ideology. If it is taken for granted that white men play the lead role in this story, a mythical dimension will naturalize the white man as the hero. But, let us consider the character of Princess Leia. She might be introduced as the damsel in distress, but as soon as Luke and Han reach the detention block where she is in the Death Star, they discover she is far from being the archetype of the defenseless princess. When faced with overwhelming odds, Leia assumes the role of heroine, leading the way for their escape. When the heroes' escape route had been cut off by Imperial soldiers just after they had broken out of the prison block, Leia is the first to offer a new route, one which leads directly to the garbage disposal unit. From the very beginning, the tension between her and Han is quite palpable. She quickly understands the escape plan to be a poorly devised one and so resorts to uttering scathing remarks while at the same time she endeavors to find a valid option for her escape, "between his howling and your blasting, it's a wonder the whole station doesn't know we're here" (Leia is addressing Han directly and obviously referring to Chewbacca).

As for the argument that good and evil are clearly separated, that might have been true for the first film, but Lucas managed to turn that around in *The Empire Strikes Back*

and particularly in *Return of the Jedi* where he further explored the character of Vader. If in *Star Wars* Vader had been evil personified, it is his interior conflict of good versus evil that will save his son in the last installment of the saga. It could be said that Lucas has added a deeper vein to his story; the Manichean universe which had been presented to audiences begins to show an unexpected complexity.

The character of Mace Windu (Samuel L. Jackson) who is only present in the later trilogy also testifies to an interesting dilemma. In *Revenge of the Sith* he, along with three other Jedi masters (Agen Kolar, Kit Fisto and Saesee Tin), is sent on a mission to arrest the Supreme Chancellor Palpatine, whom the Jedi had discovered was none other than Darth Sidious, the Sith master. After a destructive battle takes place where the other three Jedi lose their lives, Windu manages to subdue Sidious. When confronted with the difficult decision of what to do with someone as dangerous as Sidious, he opts to take his life, thus being judge, jury and executioner all in one. Even if Anakin, at his side, pleads that everybody deserves a fair trial, those arguments don't seem to diminish his determination. His behavior obviously brings to mind the eternal premise of the ends justifying the means. I believe from a certain perspective he is just as responsible for Anakin straying from the path of light as Palpatine was. In the end, Anakin discovers Jedi and Sith aren't so very different from each other. He discovers there will be individuals on both sides who are willing to do "whatever it takes" just because they believe what they are doing is right. This argument might undermine the theory of the clear distinction of good and evil in the *Star Wars* universe. For a full analysis on this theme, see Richard H. Dees's chapter, "Moral Ambiguity in a Black-and-White Universe", in the book *Star Wars and Philosophy: more powerful than you can possibly imagine*, edited by Kevin S. Decker and Jason T. Eberl.

Lev continues by saying that key *Star Wars* terminology has been used, and I might add, sometimes abused by politicians, such as Reagan, who dubbed a futuristic missile defense system "Star Wars" or referred to the Soviet Union as an "Evil Empire". In even more recent years, a special U.S. army group who intervened in the Gulf War called themselves Jedi Knights. The author states that "Lucas is not responsible for the uses politicians and governments make of his film. But the ease with which his ideas were put to political and military ends show something about the Manichean quality of the story" (Lev, 2000: 168).

I tend to agree with him, although I do recognize that the most recent trilogy is more intrinsically complex than the first one, which might be explained in part by the greater maturity Lucas had when he addressed the issues mentioned here. From the opening scroll on *The Phantom Menace*, we learn we are now dealing with taxation commercial routes, for example. When Obi-Wan uses his Jedi mind trick to persuade the Sandtroopers stationed in Mos Eisley in *Star Wars* to let the heroes go, there are no second thoughts in the audience's minds as to the validity of the methods used by the Jedi knight, for after all these soldiers were the physical representation of the Empire, the sworn enemy they were trying to escape. However, when Qui-Gon tries to persuade Watto, the junk leader at Mos Espa, to do his bidding in *The Phantom Menace* a whole new set of ethical problems presents itself. Even if Watto's moral standards are dubious, to say the least, he isn't clearly an enemy of the group of heroes which is stranded in Tatooine and need spare parts to replace those which were damaged when Queen Amidala's Royal Starship fled from the blockade the Neimodian Trade Federation had imposed on the planet of Naboo. So, the question one is forced to ask is: is it acceptable for the Jedi to take advantage of their powers, and in the process cause harm to others? Lucas resolves the problem by saying Watto is a Toydarian, so Jedi mind tricks don't work on him. This situation is much the same as what happened when Luke had tried to persuade Jabba to release Han Solo in *Return of the Jedi* (which only resulted in fiendish laughter from the gangster).

But even so, preying on the moral weaknesses of the Toydarian, namely gambling, Qui-Gon convinces Watto to gamble the fate of young Anakin who, at the time, was his slave. But the young boy's fate wasn't left to chance, when Watto randomly rolls the dice, after having bet with Qui-Gon on either Anakin or Shmi's freedom, the Jedi master uses telekinetic power to ensure it is the boy who is set free. Even after professing to Shmi that he hadn't come to Tatooine to free slaves, Qui-Gon manages to do just that. The Republic's core, Coruscant seems to be so far away from the Outer Rim world of Tatooine that its rules don't apply there, slavery can still be found in Tatooine.

When first meeting the Gungans, Qui-Gon uses his Jedi mind trick to compel their leader Boss Nass into giving him and Obi-Wan a vehicle so they can reach the Naboo. However, the Jedi seems to redeem himself for when faced with a dire situation, such as when Queen Amidala asked the Gungans for help to fight the invading forces of the Trade Federation, he says he cannot force them into taking action.

Lev also establishes another line of arguments in his reasoning; he says “One should also remember that the *Star Wars* rebellion in no way challenges gender, race or class relations. White male humans are “naturally” in position of authority” (Lev, 2000: 170). According to Lev Lucas is once again showing his conservatism, in the perpetuation of a society where humans, and particular white men are dominant. In all fairness, he does introduce the character of Lando Calrissian, played by Billy Dee Williams, in *The Empire Strikes Back* as a way of introducing the audiences to a non-white heroic figure; after all he is the one who is piloting the Millennium Falcon during the battle of Endor and is responsible for blowing up the second Death Star in *Return of the Jedi*. And also the before-mentioned Mace Windu occupies a leading place in the Jedi Council throughout the later trilogy. And as to the fact that *Star Wars* does not challenge class relations, I’m in full disagreement because for Lucas it is quite possible for Princesses to establish relationships between rogue smugglers (Leia and Han) or former heads of state with former slaves (Padme and Anakin). The character of Padme is also an interesting one because she embodies the role of supreme leader of her people (from the planet of Naboo), she is their Queen (in *Attack of the Clones* and in *Revenge of the Sith* she resigns her office and embraces a career in politics, representing her planet in the Republic Senate), but her role as monarch derives from a democratic election. So it is quite possible for Lucas to present an element of modernity as he sees no difficulty in a young queen presiding over the fate of the people of an entire planet.

But I do agree with Lev, when he quotes Robin Wood by saying “the film’s dominant tone is reassurance; things change so that they can return to a comfortable norm” (Lev, 2000: 170). Lucas doesn’t present audiences with any revolutionary ideas for his futuristic society. Quite the contrary, his inspiration comes from folk and fairy tales where conservative values make up a considerable part of the governing ideology. One of myth’s functions which can be seen operating here is that of “recording and validating institutions” (Kirk, 1993: 7). *Star Wars* was Lucas’s answer to the problems of America in the 1970’s, where religion had stopped playing a crucial role for many people, splintering and there were no “effective moral anchors” (Lev, 2000: 166), so the author’s return to traditional morality and positive heroic values was carefully planned.

Destiny vs. Free Will

These two opposing concepts are presented throughout the *Star Wars* saga in an interesting and perpetual dialectic. When analyzing the two main juvenile leads in the series of films, Luke in the first trilogy and Anakin in the second one, it seems quite noticeable that *Star Wars* is a destiny-driven story. It is foretold by the Jedi master Yoda that there is someone who will bring balance to the Force, what he doesn't seem to be sure of is that Anakin Skywalker is that someone.

When Qui-Gon Jinn encounters young Anakin Skywalker, in what could be construed at first sight as a random event, he immediately senses that there is an unusual concentration of the Force around him. Later, when he has his blood analyzed, he discovers that the Midichlorian count on the youngster's blood surpassed that of master Yoda (the living creature with the highest count of Midichlorians in the story). Perhaps it would be wise to clarify that in the *Star Wars* lore Midichlorians are microorganisms which represent the living Force. If an individual has a high percentage of Midichlorians living in his blood stream, he will be more in tune with the Force. "The Force, or the Midichlorians, plays the role of the higher power or otherworldly influence in the *Star Wars* films" (Hanson, 2002: 291). This notion, which only became apparent in the second trilogy, brings with it a "deeply conservative ideology of hereditary rule" (Kapell, 2006: 160). In his attempt to explain how he chose Anakin, and later Luke to be the heroes of his space saga, Lucas, perhaps inadvertently, seems to have embraced a deeply ingrained notion of predestination. The heroes were predestined to achieve greatness because of who they were, because of their genetic inheritance. Kapell goes on by saying: "Star Wars is an aristocratic fable about having the best stuff in your genes" (Kapell, 2006: 161). This theory seems to point directly to the operating of destiny. The characters seem to have been predestined to fulfill the roles fate had in mind for them; moreover they were only capable of doing so because of their special lineage, in this case the Skywalker family.

When questioned by Qui-Gon about her son's birth, Shmi Skywalker (Pernilla August) states that there was no father, she conceived and gave birth to him alone. Lucas is aiming to draw a parallel with the Christian belief in the figure of the messiah, the redeemer who will save mankind. In this particular universe it will be the one who can

bring balance to the Force, thus Immaculate Conception associates Anakin's destined task to that of Christ the Redeemer. Learning of Anakin's extremely high Midichlorian count Qui-Gon wonders if his discovering the boy wasn't the "will of the Force", this way stressing the notion of the strength of destiny in the development of the story. Of course in episodes II and III, Anakin will develop a strong personality in his own right, even if it is always plagued with ghosts of the past and fears for the future, particularly the fact that he wasn't able to rescue his mother from a group of Tusken Raiders who had kidnapped her (*Attack of the Clones*), and of course the fear of losing his beloved Padme Amidala. These two events will unequivocally explain the unleashing of violence and fear that will ultimately lead him to the dark side. Of course one cannot discount the paramount role Palpatine had in his fall from grace. Were it not for the Machiavellian advice that this sinister figure was feeding the young Jedi, Anakin would never have become Darth Vader.

Luke seems to be a character whose subservience to destiny is much less visible, at least the destiny that several other characters seem to have foreseen for him. In his confrontation with Vader in the Cloud City of Bespin, in *The Empire Strikes Back*, he literally decides to jump into the unknown void instead of following in his father's evil footsteps.

Faced with defeat at the hands of Vader, and the temptation to join the dark side, Luke leaps off the tower and into the abyss. This is perhaps the greatest example of free will, for his sacrificial act is contrary to both Luke's instinctual wish to survive and the wishes of his father.

(Hanson, 2002: 294)

What is interesting is that Luke arrived in Bespin precisely by rejecting a destiny that was envisioned for him by Yoda. According to the Jedi master's wishes, the would-be Jedi should have stayed in Dagobah and completed his training. Luke felt the urge to leave because in a Force-induced vision of the future, he was able to see his closest friends were in harm's way. Even if the outcome of his rescue attempt failed to be what he expected, Luke showed he was someone who was ultimately responsible for his own fate.

In *Return of the Jedi*, Luke once again proves it is free will which guides his actions, not pre-destined fate. When Vader goads him by telling him to fulfill his destiny (a destiny both he and the Emperor have foreseen) and take his rightful place at his side, Luke

chooses to reject him. Forced physically to confront his father when the Emperor threatens to convert his sister Leia to the dark side if his conversion ultimately fails, Luke proves to be a superior adversary to the weary fallen Jedi. In the climatic finale of the duel, Luke, recognizing the overwhelming similarities which he and his father share, chooses to throw away his lightsaber stating that the Emperor had already lost, for he was a Jedi, such as his father had been before him. Palpatine's attempt to murder the young Jedi forces Vader to act and save his son's life, in this way redeeming himself.

The confrontation between destiny and free will is powerfully explored in the rich and visually innovative science fiction saga *The Matrix*. In the three films which compose the trilogy *The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *Matrix Revolutions* (2003), the Wachowski brothers grant the character of Neo (Keanu Reeves) the title of the "chosen one". The element of choice is starkly laid out in the scene of the taking of the blue or the red pill that will either lead to either revelation or oblivion, freely chosen. In *The Matrix Reloaded*, he establishes a conversation with the Architect, played by Helmut Bakaitis (a visual metaphor for God, the programmer of the matrix, in the saga) who says:

"I am the Architect. I created the Matrix. I've been waiting for you. You have many questions, and although the process has altered your consciousness, you remain irrevocably human. Ergo, some of my answers you will understand, and some of them you will not. Concordantly, while your first question may be the most pertinent, you may or may not realize it is also the most irrelevant."

Establishing that having a conversation with God isn't easy, we learn he is the sixth person to have been destined to be "the chosen one", thus Neo personifies the notion of manifest destiny (in the process of becoming the "chosen one" Neo has to find a way of saving Zion, humanity's last stronghold against an overwhelming attack from the machines). The difference is precisely the character's free will. Neo, chooses the path he's about to follow. When confronted with the Oracle he poses an interesting question: "But if you already know, how can I make a choice?" which is met with a self-explanatory answer "Because you didn't come here to make the choice, you've already made it. You're here to try to understand "why" you made it. I thought you'd have figured that out by now."

These examples from *The Matrix* trilogy are a necessarily brief illustration of the centrality of the subject of free will and the opposing notion of predestination in films like *Star Wars* where the characters have heroic missions to either take up or reject.

Chapter IV – *Star Wars*: Myth and Genre

When the general public classifies the *Star Wars* saga of films as science fiction films they are trying to group these films into a category which has a specific number of elements (Sci-Fi). What they doing is placing *Star Wars* into a specific genre. Ryall understands genre in the following way:

Genres can be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual art products, and which supervise both their construction by artists and their reading by audiences.

(Ryall, 1975: 28)

With the concept of genre we come to the conclusion that any cultural object even if pertaining to different media forms “can be grouped into categories, and (...) each category or class is marked by a particular set of conventions, features and norms” (Creeber, 2001: 1). Nick Lacey focuses his attention on discovering and defining the elements which constitute specific genres. These elements consist of “characters, setting, iconography, narrative and style of text” (Lacey, 2000: 133). For Lacey the existence of the concept of genre is made possible by considering three different elements: artists (and institutions for they are responsible for marketing and distributing a text), audiences and the text itself (Lacey, 2000: 133).

The concept of genre is a fluid one, forever changing and it is impossible to find a cultural object which is constituted by all the different elements which compose the genre in which it is supposed to be encapsulated. What audiences will find are points of contact and differences from the generic template that genre offers. Of course, due to a necessity of specification not unrelated with marketing sub-genres have been created. Once a cultural object has been classified as belonging to a specific genre there are “certain expectations about what will happen and what rules apply in this particular narrative world (diegesis)” (Lacey, 2000: 135). Another fulcral aspect is that genre conditions meaning.

In the case of *Star Wars* if people rush to classify it as science fiction, they will inevitably want to see as many elements of the genre associated with it as possible, with it risking falling short of the expectations of those people who identify themselves with the

generic template of science fiction. Brian Aldiss defines one of the concerns of science fiction:

Science fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science).

(Aldiss, 1973: 8)

Science fiction is traditionally forward-looking, speculative; however it isn't easy to find concerns such as these in the *Star Wars* saga. Thus it can be classified as "non-genre SF" in the sense that it "merely uses the trappings of the genre for an action-adventure narrative" (Lacey, 2000: 170). This author actually states that Hollywood has frequently made a substantial commercial profit exploring adventure/action films which contain innovative special effects and that audiences rush to see those films not because of the central concerns of the science fiction genre, but to be "amazed by the latest in computer-generated special effects" (Lacey, 2000: 170). Here is perhaps one of the reasons why so many science fiction fans aren't particularly enthusiastic about *Star Wars*. But the previous quote shows it is perfectly possible for an object to belong to more than one genre at the same time. In fact:

"*Star Wars* (created by George Lucas, 1977) is often cited as a turning point for the use of genre in Hollywood. It was more than just a mix of science fiction, western and fairy-tale fantasy, the film also harked back to the Saturday matinee adventure serials, such as *Flash Gordon*, of the 1930's and 40's"

(Lacey, 2000: 216)

By getting inspiration from all these different genres Lucas manages to reach a broader spectrum of audiences. Consider, for example the influence of the screwball comedy on the character of Princess Leia, when she takes an active part in her own rescuing on board the Death Star in *Star Wars* and in the process continuously bickers with Han Solo, even going so far as to call Chewbacca a "big walking rug". If science fiction is

a genre which traditionally appeals to male audiences, soap operas are usually considered to be more attuned to capturing the attention of female audiences, “this was implicit in their original scheduling, in North America, as “daytime” programs for housewives” (Lacey, 2000: 221). These dissimilar components help to break down the traditional male/female divide associated with genre films and consequently increase the films’ popularity among different audiences.

What I hope to go on to demonstrate is the existence of key elements in *Star Wars* which obviously belong to different genres, namely science fiction and the Western. But first there is a need for a division within the genre of science fiction which includes the term “space opera”:

The term “space opera” is modeled on “horse opera”, a critical term for Western fiction. Space opera denotes those works which have the typical structures and plots of Westerns but use the settings and trappings of science fiction.

(Scholes and Rabkin, 1977: 170)

If *Star Wars* clearly falls in the category of the space opera, it is also clear that some of the elements pertaining to science fiction iconography are present in the film, namely laser blasters, spaceships, aliens and distinct barren, constructed environments filled with computers and technology (a considerable number of agents of the Empire dwell on the giant space station called the Death Star). Other elements which can be found in this saga and which are consistent with the genre of science fiction are vast expanses of time and space. The diegesis reports to actions which have happened “a long, long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.” To tell his story Lucas envisions several different planets, and many scenes of the films are set not only in space but in hyperspace.

One should also not forget that the *Star Wars* saga brings to the big screen some elements which are commonly associated with another genre: that of the soap opera. One of the main characteristics of soap operas is the fact that their narrative is broadcast in a serialized manner, “seriality exhibits as a core feature the fact that fiction is experienced over an extended period of time” (Creeber, 2001: 47). Remember that *Star Wars* was released in 1977 and *Revenge of the Sith* in 2005, causing some comments on the eccentricity of the project and the fact that “...the logistics of making such a serial in this

day and age could be undertaken only by someone with enormous resources” (Thompson, 2003: 105). An argument used by Creeber is that “The serial form is closely aligned with the rise of fiction as a commodity” (Creeber, 2001: 47); this idea is reinforced by Lacey when he says that “seriality is beloved of capitalism as it is one way of mass producing cultural objects” (Lacey, 2000: 169). Let’s not forget that *Star Wars* is one of Hollywood’s most successful commercial franchises. Some elements often found in soap operas are those of “competing and intertwining plot lines” (Creeber, 2001: 47) and the fact that the soap opera narrative “tends to focus on particular communities and family groups” (Creeber, 2001: 47). The way that the *Star Wars* narrative is told often features “intertwining plot lines” and the fate of the galaxy lies to a considerable extent in the hands of the Skywalker family. Soap operas frequently feature “cliffhangers, characterological reversals and last-minute plot twists” (Creeber, 2001: 48). At the ending of *The Empire Strikes Back* audiences are left in suspense as to the fate of Han Solo, who had been encased in a carbonite block and taken by the bounty hunter Bobba Fett. Throughout the first trilogy Vader encapsulates the personification of evil, only to change sides at the climactic scene in the lightsaber duel in *Return of the Jedi*. Probably the most unexpected plot twist in the entire saga occurs in the Cloud city of Bespin, in *The Empire Strikes Back*, when Vader reveals to Luke that he is his father. Considering all these different elements which approximate *Star Wars* to the genre of soap operas, it seems opportune to draw a parallel to the American soap opera *Dallas* (1978), which was also at the time a tremendous commercial success, “it was exported to 90 countries with 200 million viewers a year” (Creeber, 2001: 52). Dallas’s villain J.R. was prone to periodic changes of heart and generosity, only to suddenly lapse back into a vindictive schemer. Brother Bobby Ewing had many of the attributes of Luke Skywalker. In a sense it could be said that *Star Wars* is a *Dallas* in space, nevertheless we must never forget that the “emotional realism” (Creeber, 2001: 52) which is an integral part of the success of the soap opera is just one of the elements differentiating the two cultural objects.

However *Star Wars* can also be read as a Western because of a number of elements which are constituents in the basic schema of this genre. But first a brief mention should be given to the fact that both science fiction and particularly Western are genres which are excellent vehicles for mythical dissemination. The Western particularly uses mythical motifs which are very dear to American culture. For example the typical space for

Westerns is the American Frontier which “deals with the conflict between wilderness and civilization” (Lacey, 2000: 138). This theme is often revisited in *Star Wars*, namely the desert planet of Tatooine where Luke’s uncle Owen is a “moisture farmer” who struggles with the planet’s harsh conditions; it is common for Westerns to tell the stories of homesteaders (cattlemen and farmers). Lacey also points out that a recurrent theme in Westerns is the outlaw as the good guy (Lacey, 2000: 140), focusing the narrative in redemption and on the itinerant stranger as savior. In *Star Wars* this particular line of the narrative can be found in the character of Han Solo, who will be later explored in this section. With the purpose of helping clarify the development of the Western genre over time “Will Wright (1975) created a typology of four (...) Western narratives, in film” (Lacey, 2000: 140). He says that predominantly from 1958 to 1970 Westerns dealt with narratives of the “Professional fighters who take jobs for money”. This motif is also introduced in *Star Wars* both with the character of Han Solo and those of the Bounty Hunters. The substantial difference is that even if both Han Solo and the Bounty Hunters that Vader hires to find the Millennium Falcon in *The Empire Strikes Back* take jobs for money, the first develops a conscience while the others, specifically Bobba Fett are only focused on getting a profit for their endeavors.

Han Solo – the fading Gunslinger

The character of Han Solo, played by Harrison Ford, represents the mercenary pilot, and even the name is evocative of being out for oneself, having to cope with difficulties, and overcoming obstacles alone, like his namesake Napoleon Solo from *The Man from Uncle* TV spy series. He evolves over the three films of the original trilogy but at the starting point in *Star Wars* where audiences are introduced to Solo, the classic figure of the American anti-hero is evoked.

The clothes he originally sports are reminiscent of the cowboy image we’ve so often encountered in westerns. The tall boots, the dark vest, covering a white shirt and of course the holster, giving the character fast access to his gun, epitomizes the philosophy of shooting first and asking questions later. Peter Jackson comments on the similarities

between Solo and the iconic western outlaw (Jackson, *Star Wars The Legacy Revealed*) but of course those similarities go way beyond the way the character dresses. In the collective consciousness the cowboy also resonates with skillfulness and independence, characteristics Solo possesses. In this particular sense, he is in direct opposition to Luke, who is a remarkably innocent young man, fighting for a cause which he believes to be just. Han has had enough adventures in his life to make him street-smart. A fast space ship and a good blaster are objects he can control, and have proven useful to him countless times before. He also has tremendous difficulties in acknowledging the existence of the Force. His skepticism in acknowledging a spiritual world contrasts once again with Luke's willingness to embrace spirituality.

When in *Star Wars* we first see the captain of the Millennium Falcon, we immediately discover that his relationship with Luke is going to be a rebarbative one; it is quite common for the two characters to get involved in arguments, whether if it's over the sum of money Han asks Ben for to complete the mission of taking them to Alderaan, (according to Luke they could almost buy their own space ship with that money) or when he first sees the Millennium Falcon, Luke just states that it looks like a "piece of junk." Han is impervious to the criticism, stating that he's made a lot of changes to the ship himself. This could be symbolically perceived as "someone discovering his or her unique way of getting about in the world" (Galipeau, 2001: 40). This way of seeing Han is consistent with his natural ability to take care of himself and his ability to mold reality around himself so that he could best take advantage of it. After all he is a scoundrel, a smuggler, a lovable rogue who makes a living out of illicit business transactions with several other shady figures.

One of these figures approaches him as soon as Ben and Luke leave the cantina in Mos Eisley. Greedo, a Rodian bounty hunter in the service of Jabba the Hutt, confronts Solo as he is exiting the cantina, demanding to know if the pilot has got the money he owes the crime lord. Both characters sit at a booth in the cantina and begin a tense negotiation. The exchange of words quickly turns sour and the alien gets blasted by the pilot. For me, what is interesting about this scene is that when Lucas in 1997, rereleased *Star Wars*, he added some new footage and some of the scenes were altered. In the 1977 release, Solo shot Greedo in cold blood, establishing himself as the archetypal gunslinger of classic western stories where lethal violence was partly justified, after all the character of Greedo

represents a low-life bounty hunter who, given the chance, would have done exactly the same thing to Solo. In the 1997 version Greedo fires first and only afterwards does Han return fire, killing him instantly. We detect a sense of period in this scene; unprovoked lethal violence seems less justifiable in the 1990's. Personally I believe the first version, however politically incorrect it might be, stands for a better representation of the character of the anti-hero who is Han. In this sense we can foresee reverberations of other iconic film characters in Han, he seems to share the essential traits of Rick in *Casablanca* and a bit of the Clint Eastwood/Dirty Harry archetype. The theme of the frontier, a space beyond the law, where it is clearly survival of the fittest, is the type of scenario the director had originally been aiming for.

Curiously it will be Shmi Skywalker, when she is talking to Qui-Gon Jinn in *The Phantom Menace* that will summarize in a simple sentence the generic feeling that there is “no Republic in Tatooine”. At the time she was referring to the existence of slaves on that planet, a custom which apparently had been extinguished in the core planets of the Republic. So we are faced with the conclusion that Tatooine is still a place with no law, where strength still prevails, but it's just not acceptable to have one of the heroes of the saga so blatantly exhibit disregard for life, even if it's an alienated bounty hunter's life.

This assertion brings us to two different conclusions, the first one is that Han Solo personifies the role of the anti-hero, who “develops counter to the hero of the story” (Hanson, 2002: 376), and secondly that speaking in Jungian terms he represents a “shadow” figure for Luke (Galipeau, 2001: 38). The fact that this character seems to mirror what Luke could perhaps turn into were he to lose his childlike innocence makes it possible for him to represent the unconscious part of the hero's psyche, becoming a shadow for him. The evolution of the character can be easily perceived throughout the three original films. He begins the narrative in a detached position, caring only for money, remaining distant from the plight of the heroes. This situation changes, giving him a sense of belonging which he didn't previously possess. Eventually Han will discover his place at the side of the Rebellion, in their struggle to overthrow tyranny and oppression personified by the evil Galactic Empire.

When Princess Leia is successfully brought back to Yavin, Han Solo's part in the Rebel's venture seems to have ended. In a conversation with Luke, he bids him well in the traditional way of the film “may the Force be with you”, recognizing that a strong

connection between the two men has been established, most certainly caused by the adventures they have engaged in together; for the first time a sense of respect for the younger, more inexperienced hero emerges from the Corellian pilot. However even Luke's plea for him to stay, stating he's obviously a good pilot and the Rebellion needs all the manpower it can get, is fruitless. Han's concern is the bounty Jabba has placed on him. With the money the Rebels have paid him, he will be able to turn a new page in his life. However the linearity of the character ends at the climactic moment of the battle of Yavin when the Millennium Falcon appears, shooting one of the Tie fighters that is Vader's escort, at the same time as Han boisterously makes his presence felt. It doesn't take long for him to shoot the second fighter, making it crash into the side of Vader's ship, which spins uncontrollably into the vastness of space. Luke is free to complete his mission and destroy the gigantic battle station. This change of heart denotes his commitment, if not to the Rebels' cause, at least to his friend, something he hadn't shown so far. It is a commitment which will not be final, just yet, however it does indicate that the character has matured, and discovered that there are higher values at stake in life than his own personal interests.

In this entire process, one cannot help but notice the influence Chewbacca has in the shaping of the pilot's mind. Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) has some novel traits. The first of which being that he is a Wookiee, one of the few heroic main characters of the first trilogy who isn't human. In itself this characteristic points to a multiplicity of origins among the Rebel cohorts, as opposed to the closed circle of the highest spheres of the Empire, where only humans are admitted. Such an indication is in itself relevant for the characterization of the Rebels as tolerant towards difference and willing to admit pluralism in their ranks, once again in contrast to the Empire.

Another intriguing aspect is that the Wookiee communicates in a growling language only Han Solo mysteriously understands.¹ Having been rescued by Solo when he was a slave he feels he owes the pilot a debt of honor and so accompanies the smuggler wherever he goes. "... the more than two-centuries-old Chewbacca has seen life as a slave, a smuggler, and a topnotch pilot and mechanic. Through it all, he has remained the true

¹ In charge of creating the sound for the character's voice was Ben Burtt. Although Lucas was used to working with Walter Murch on sound montage, he wasn't available for this film. Burtt was recommended to Lucas by Professor Ken Miura, at the USC film department. He was also responsible for the creation of the sounds of spaceships, and weapons. For the sound of the Wookiee Burtt recorded a bear named Pooh (Windham, 2010: 41).

conscience of those around him” (Sansweet, 1998: 48). In the crucial moments of the story the dramatic growling of the Wookie forces Han to reconsider the choices he has made, compelling the rogue adventurer to rethink his actions. Sometimes even a look from the Wookie is sufficient to make Han feel guilty about his selfish choices. Chewbacca is the classic western side-kick, Tonto to Han’s Lone Ranger – even the name is redolent of sitting out on the porch chewing tobacco.

The Empire Strikes Back sees a whole new dimension to Han. Formerly the character had been drawn to a path which is genuinely different from that travelled by Luke. As the young hero discovers that Vader is his father, Han discovers that he isn’t impervious to the growing feeling of fondness for Princess Leia, and furthermore he becomes aware that there is a place for him in the rebellion. He can, once again, learn to trust someone other than himself or his Wookie companion. “He travels from self-service and cynicism back to where he can trust someone else again.” (Hanson, 2002: 378). This development of the character is consistent with one of the overall themes of the saga of the films, which is the issue of identity and belonging. Solo seems to have found his place in the *Star Wars* universe, somehow being self-sufficient and independent doesn’t appear to be enough for the rogue pilot. Underneath all his cynicism and refusal to understand what is at stake, he too chooses to stay with the rebels, he chooses to belong to a group, even if it is the underdog in a fierce competition for the control of the universe. When exploring the reasons for the popularity of these films, Tiffin explains why the re-release of the original *Star Wars* trilogy in 1997 was met so enthusiastically, particularly by teenage audiences.

The appeal of the *Star Wars* series to adolescents particularly is now readily explicable; the attraction is in recognition, the film’s dealing intrinsically with issues of identity, self-worth, and family.

(Tiffin, 1999: 70)

She even goes so far as to quote Malcom who, because of the issues being dealt with in the films, attributes to *Star Wars* the epithet of an “eternally modern story”(Tiffin, 1990: 70).

As *The Empire Strikes Back* reaches its end, we see an inversion of the roles in the narrative. If in *Star Wars* Han Solo was among the rescuers of the Princess (although rather

reluctantly) the second film ends with the yet unsuspecting siblings vowing to rescue their friend who has been imprisoned in carbonite by Darth Vader in Bespin. His ultimate purpose would be to do the same to Luke so that he could bring him into the presence of Emperor Palpatine.

Galipeau suggests that this episode raises the symbolic theme of freezing, in opposition to the theme of thawing which had been present earlier in the film (Galipeau, 2001: 153-154). At the beginning of the film, while the rebels were still on the ice planet of Hoth C3-P0 remarks rather humorously to R2-D2 that the Princess's private chamber had partially melted because the smaller droid had turned on the heating system there. On a related note, the Princess herself seems to have been "thawing" her so far icy heart and developing a closer relationship with Han. The encasement in carbonite brings with it the motifs of cold and dark (Galipeau, 2001: 143) and essentially attributes to Han the characteristic of being isolated.

After the success of the carbonite process, Vader loses interest in Han, giving him to the bounty hunter, Bobba Fett, who is eager to claim the bounty Jabba has put on Solo's head and in the process establishes himself as the most ruthless bounty hunter in the galaxy. So the wheels are set in motion that will lead the group of heroes to Luke's home world of Tatooine, to the palace of the crime lord Jabba the Hutt. The third installment of the saga *Return of the Jedi* starts telling that particular tale.

The film, originally named *Revenge of the Jedi*, begins its storytelling in the desert world of Tatooine. The name was eventually changed by Lucas after reaching the conclusion that revenge wasn't a feeling that Jedi should entertain. In spite of this change the title was never completely dropped for in 2005 he resumed the idea of revenge in *Revenge of the Sith*. The closeness of the two titles is mirrored by the character of Luke who, in *Return of the Jedi*, has become a Jedi by realizing that within him there was a dark side that can't be ignored. The similarity in the way both the young Jedi and his father dresses is obvious, furthermore Luke doesn't hesitate to use the Force in the same way as his father did in the first two films. When he arrives at the crime lord's palace he immediately chokes two Gamorrean guards (Jabba's pig-like minions) using the Force. So far we had only seen such a display of the potential of the Force from Vader as he unleashed his anger on the imperial officers who had failed him in *The Empire Strikes Back* or to force the other imperial officers to acknowledge the existence of the mystical

energy in *Star Wars*. The generic names of the characters - Gamorrean guards (never uttered in the film) - are reminiscent of the biblical city of Gomorra, known for its gross moral turpitude. In Jabba's palace we will find a clear parallel to that decadence. Luke is eager to trick Bib Fortuna (Jabba's majordomo) into securing an audience with the Hutt, by using a Jedi mind trick. The Force is once again put to use to compel the feeble-minded to do what is demanded of them; in this case Luke explores the greed of the majordomo because he says his master will be pleased with him and surely reward him appropriately. In the decadent scenario which is Jabba's palace, cupidity proves to be entirely predictable.

Jabba is a symbolic personification of greed and decay. His revolting figure represents corruption, being a crime lord; he is a brutish representative of power in a place where external authority seems to be lacking. Galipeau notes that the symbolic female principle encapsulated in the slave alien dancing girl (Oola), who is chained to the behemoth figure, "is not allowed to live freely; it is enslaved to the lusts of others and treated with disrespect" (Galipeau, 2001: 181).

It is curious that, in his attempt to rescue his companion, Luke chooses a message "laden with chivalrous undertones" (Hanson, 2002: 226) to persuade Jabba to free the Corellian pilot, something the gangster is not inclined to do. Even failing in the negotiations, the young Jedi knight succeeds in distributing the elements that will prove pivotal in the upcoming confrontation (not only the droids and himself, but also Lando, and finally Chewbacca and Leia).

It is Leia, disguised as a bounty hunter (Boushh), that will eventually free Solo from his imprisonment in the carbonite block. Galipeau recognizes in this passage the recurring theme of thawing, one which has already appeared on *The Empire Strikes Back*. As Han is saved from perpetual freezing in the carbonite block, so are his feelings towards Leia freed when she answers his question (without the helmet which was part of her disguise) "Who are you?" with "Someone who loves you." "Now her love is once more openly expressed as the frozen aspects of him are released" (Galipeau, 2001: 184). When he is freed he experiences a "symbolic rebirth" (Galipeau, 2001: 184) that will cause him to see things around him in a different light. At first he is blind as a side-effect of the prolonged period of hibernation, but he soon discovers that while he was frozen things have changed dramatically. Luke has achieved the aspired position of Jedi knight and Lando (who was responsible for his betrayal in Bespin) is not only once again to be considered a friend, but

also directly involved in his rescue. All these changes will prove to Han the value of true friendship and the sacrifice his friends were willing to make to save him.

Bounty Hunters

When the rebel heroes escape the voracious appetite of the space slug in *The Empire Strikes Back*, an episode which Hanson classifies as resembling the “«belly of the whale» archetype that often arises in the *Star Wars* saga” (Hanson, 202: 192), the Millennium Falcon flies directly into contact with the Imperial Fleet and only a daring simulation of a direct attack on the bridge of the Star Destroyer where Vader stands saves the heroes. The Millennium Falcon attaches itself to one of the flanks of the larger vessel hoping to simply drift into space as soon as the Imperial fleet follows procedure and jettison their garbage before jumping into hyper space. One of the officers manifests his incredulity that the ship seems to have vanished into thin air, not being able to understand how such a small ship can have a cloaking device. It is in this context that Vader demarks himself from the rest of the Imperial forces. When conventional strategies seem to fail, the Sith lord looks for unorthodox ways of understanding the problem; a group of bounty hunters is briefly seen on the bridge of his Star Destroyer. Reynolds notes that “Imperial rewards posted for all such “enemies of the state” have made bounty hunting a thriving profession” (Reynolds, 2006: 252). Contemptuously, an officer exclaims he doesn’t need “their kind here”, however it is not clear if he opposes the line of work these individuals have chosen or the fact that they are aliens, physically distinct from the minions of the Empire.

However brief the appearance of the six bounty hunters in the film, it has managed to awaken a disproportionate interest on the part of fans of the films. First we are introduced to Bobba Fett, the only bounty hunter who gets to verbalize his thoughts in the film. Ruthlessness and a fanatical dedication to the pursuit of his prey have gained him the title of the best bounty hunter in the galaxy. Played by Jeremy Bulloch, the character proved so popular that Lucas even explained in the later trilogy his origin. He was a clone for another bounty hunter, Jango Fett (Temuera Morrison), who met his fate at the blade of Mace Windu in the battle of Geonosis in *Attack of the Clones*. But returning to Bobba Fett,

Reynolds says that he “First encountered Luke Skywalker on a moon in the Panna system, where he almost tricked Luke into giving away the new location of the Rebel Base” (Reynolds, 2006: 250). The events described by Reynolds take place in the animated section of the infamous *Star Wars Holiday Special*, the CBS television special broadcast on November 17th, 1978. Considered one of the first spin-offs of the saga, the TV special got quite a negative response from audiences and even Lucas, who only had a limited role in the film’s production, and was clearly displeased with the end result.² The fact that it has never been released on home video or even re-telecast has conferred special status on it. However, due to the dedicated efforts of some hardcore fans, it remains possible to view the television show on YouTube.

Sansweet attests that “many tales are told of his [Fett] background, but there are very few verifiable facts, perhaps by design” (Sansweet, 1998:101). It is unquestionable that the aura of mystery surrounding the character has contributed to its popularity. Besides his altered Mandalorian armor, which includes multiple weapons and gadgets, his spaceship *Slave I* is an essential part of his deadly arsenal. In *Attack of the Clones* we can see a clear demonstration of just how lethal this ship can be when Jango Fett faces Obi-Wan Kenobi’s Jedi Starfighter. In the expanded universe of *Star Wars* (the development of the story not featured on the films, but in novels, comic books or video games) Fett and his *Slave I* have had an encounter with *IG-2000*, the ship of IG-88, another one of the bounty hunters who was summoned by Darth Vader aboard the Star Destroyer on *The Empire Strikes Back*. It took place after Fett had the body of Han Solo encased in carbonite and was about to deliver him to Jabba the Hutt for the bounty. As a result of the confrontation of the two bounty hunters the *IG-2000* was destroyed and *Slave I* suffered extensive damage. In *Return of the Jedi* the notorious bounty hunter is last seen being knocked into the mouth of the Sarlacc, on Tatooine, and destined to have an excruciating death (originally destined for Luke and his friends), but once again he manages to escape, being later saved by another bounty hunter named Dengar, who wishes to conduct a personal vendetta against Han Solo. From then on he encounters Han Solo on several occasions (Sansweet, 1998: 101-102). What is interesting is that the facts previously mentioned are

² The TV program was originally to be directed by David Acomb, a classmate of Lucas at USC film school, but he abandoned the project and was replaced by Steve Binder.

only marginally addressed in the films; they are fully explored as hypertext in the expanded universe and have proven quite popular among fans.

Dengar has reportedly undergone “brain surgery that has replaced his hypothalamus with circuitry, making him a nearly unfeeling killer (Reynolds, 2006: 252). Sansweet offers further information on the character’s background. Apparently, before being transformed into a cold blooded killer by the Empire, Dengar used to be a swoop racer who had a run-in with Han Solo, the outcome of a private race between the two adventurers caused a spectacular crash in which Dengar suffered severe head trauma and eventually caused his banishment from the professional racing league (Sansweet, 1998: 72). The bounty hunter blames Solo personally for his fate, so the opportunity Vader provides on the Executor (his Star Destroyer), by placing a bounty on the Millennium Falcon, is immediately seized upon to settle the score.

IG-88 is an assassin droid who murdered its programmers upon activation. It programmed three other robots similar to itself and had the megalomaniacal agenda of instigating a droid uprising with the broadcasting of a signal from the second Death Star. Its plans were thwarted when the Rebels destroyed the second Death Star in the battle of Yavin. Having had multiple showdowns with Bobba Fett, some of the “clones” of the assassin droid were even destroyed by the notorious bounty hunter. In one of the scenes from *The Empire Strikes Back*, on the sequence set on the scrap processing levels of Cloud City there is a brief scene where a lifeless IG-88 is shown leaning against the wall near a furnace. We learn from Sansweet that it resulted from a failed ambush attempt on Bobba Fett who “...paralyzed it with an ion cannon, then finished it off, leaving the hulk for recycling” (Reynolds, 2006: 252). Casey attests that “IG-88 is obsessed with hunting and killing, as a result of its incomplete droid programming.” Due to its unpredictability assassin droids were outlawed after the Clone Wars, but they “still continue to stalk the galaxy” (Casey, 2011: 89).

Another droid which can be seen is 4-LOM, its name being an acronym (for love of money), it was “once a sophisticated protocol droid, made to resemble the species it worked with...” had its programming “degraded and it became a criminal, specializing in anticipating the moves of target beings.” (Reynolds, 2006: 253) The droid teamed up with another bounty hunter, Zuckuss, who uses “the mystic religious rituals of findsman traditions dating back centuries on his gaseous home world of Gand” (Reynolds, 2006:

253). Zuckuss is a tireless tracker who seems to be highly effective in his efforts to catch his bounty. "He used the elaborate and arcane rituals of his ancestors to help him find his hunts" (Sansweet, 1998: 353). Audiences are shown a glimpse of an individual who uses mystical rituals to catch his prey; such simulations of Native American Indian tracking and stalking crafts couldn't be more different from the faith the Empire places on technology.

Lewis and Keier, in their book *Star Wars: The New Essential Guide to Alien Species* undertake a "scientific" analysis of each one of the alien species which dwell in the *Star Wars* universe, collecting data from numerous sources, the six films, the *Clone Wars* animated series, the *Jedi Order* series of novels among others. They explain that "findsmen are religious hunters who locate their prey by interpreting omens sent to them in the course of divine rituals" (Lewis, 2006: 65). In the Gand culture an individual must perform a major accomplishment in life before he or she is given the honor of using their family name. "Only after Gands have become masters of some skill or achieved high praise or recognition may they finally use their first as well as their last name" (Lewis, 2006: 65). This ritual in which an individual obtains a name for himself, or in some cases reaches adulthood is quite common in human society, for example in some African tribes physical trials attest to the rite of passing on to adulthood.

This particular species (The Gand) seem to reserve an honorable place for people hunters in their society. This seems to be a recurrent motif in science-fiction cinema, it can be seen in the *Predator* series of films, starting with John McTiernan's *Predator* (1987), where an alien species bases its hierarchy system on the ability of an individual to hunt and collect trophies from its prey. The prestige obtained by an individual within this society would be proportional to the lethality of the prey he is able to kill or capture. This motif is resurrected for the 2010 installment of the franchise, *Predators* directed by Nimrod Antal, and produced by Robert Rodriguez.

The last bounty hunter is Bossk, a reptilian Trandoshan, who specialized in hunting Wookies, this information gains a more subtle value knowing that some years earlier Han Solo had rescued a group of Wookies who had been made prisoners by the Trandoshan. Among those Wookies was Chewbacca, who since then has befriended the reluctant hero. "Bossk exuded a brackish smell, which kept most beings from getting too close. He had supersensitive eyes and thus hated light" (Sansweet, 1998: 33-34). From Lewis we learn that Trandoshans are "cold-blooded, they possess scaly skin, which they shed roughly

every standard year...” and “...they are able to regenerate lost limbs, at least until they reach Trandosha middle age” (Lewis, 2006: 163). In the *Clone Wars* animated series Bossk plays an important role in the education of a young Bobba Fett, as chronologically the sequence of events narrated there occurs between *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. He teams up with Bobba Fett shortly after Jango Fett was killed in *Attack of the Clones* by Mace Windu.

What is interesting for me is the amount of literature existing on the characters which only marginally appear in this specific scene from *The Empire Strikes Back* (except for Bobba Fett). For me this attests to the richness of the universe created by Lucas and the multiplicity of personal stories which intersect with the broader story narrated in the films. The fact that someone has written a book, not on specific characters, but on the species which these characters represent, complete with physiological, historical, sociological and religious backgrounds, epitomizes the compulsion that fans feel to discover more details about the intricacies of the universe Lucas invented, and which cannot possibly be obtained from the films themselves.



From left to right Darth Vader, Dengar, IG-88, Bobba Fett, Bossk, 4-LOM and Zuckuss

Chapter V: Character Archetypes: Heroes, Mentors and Villains.

In this final chapter I would now like to explore some other reasons for the success of the *Star Wars* saga, and in doing so establish connections to other significant cultural objects and sources of inspiration for Lucas's space epic. Starting from the premise that one of the reasons for the success of the saga is storytelling, I would like to deepen the analysis of some of the pivotal moments of the saga. Another reason for this success is an ensemble of archetypal characters who journey on roads well-travelled in the popular imagination. Resurrecting themes commonly explored in mythical tales, the filmmaker manages to actively capture the imagination of his audiences and secure an ever-expanding legion of fans.

Luke Skywalker – idealist, hero and redeemer

Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) assumes the role of protagonist in the first trilogy of *Star Wars* films. This character will experience what is a recurrent theme in mythological tales, which is that of the hero's mission. This journey will involve several obstacles which Luke will have to overcome, much like Odysseus when he tries to return home to Ithaca after the Trojan War in *The Odyssey*. Of course this journey is also a metaphor for maturation, from young adulthood to full adulthood. Throughout the three films there a remarkable development of this character, he begins as an insecure young man, who is faced with decisions which won't be easy to make. Lev considers Luke's adventure both physical and spiritual, he is to save the princess, defeat the evil Empire and ultimately establish a more just government (Lev, 2000: 166). At the same time he has to reach adulthood, overcoming the uncertainties of his former self and building a confident and capable character in the process.

From the moment his uncle Owen asks him to clean the two new droids he has just bought to help in the moisture farm, (R2-D2 and C-3PO), and he accidentally stumbles across a message for an Obi-Wan, his life will forever change. Galipeau is ready to identify

this sequence as a very close representation of what is described in Jungian psychology as the *anima* archetype “the feminine aspect of the transcendent Self, a key component of psychological wholeness” (Galipeau, 2001: 23). For Galipeau Luke projects onto the female figure of Leia qualities of his feminine side. As he explains “A key part of a man’s development is learning to distinguish anima projections from what actually takes place in relational exchanges with a woman” (Galipeau, 2001: 281). This might shed some light on the somewhat schizoid relationship that Luke develops with Leia. In *Star Wars*³ there appears to be a sexual interest which commands Luke’s actions. His feathers are profoundly ruffled when Han Solo taunts him, as he speculates about the possibility of Leia nurturing any kind of feelings for him. However later on audiences will discover that there is no love triangle in this trilogy, the romantic interest which will develop between Leia and Han will not be challenged by Luke, who learns in *Return of the Jedi* he is, in fact, Leia’s brother. He has finally reached a state of maturity that will allow him to establish the difference between the projections of his own psyche’s *anima* and the person of Leia.

Luke needs this call to adventure that will get him started on his great journey. This will eventually steer him away from known comforts and dull familiarity. Finding Ben Kenobi proves quite an ordeal in itself. When Luke looks for R2-D2, who is determined to find the recipient of the princess’s message (Obi-wan Kenobi), in the desert plains of Tatooine from a Jungian approach we are entering the world of the *shadow*, “The dark face of the unconscious now gets to speak” (Galipeau, 2001: 27). Tusken Raiders or Sand People, who attack Luke, represent negative parts of the psyche materializing not in his dream, but in reality. They are also a very real consequence of the dangers of diverting from the path. Even though Luke was fully warned about the bandaged creatures, he was still caught off guard by the confrontation with these belligerent anthropoids. This is merely a materialization of how much Luke has to grow if he is to rise to the expectations placed upon him.

The insecurity the hero displays when he is confronted by Ben at his dwelling, asking him to follow him on his quest for the princess, establishes him as an ordinary limited man, further developing the audience’s connection to him. Luke’s first reaction is to reject the

³ The *Star Wars* film often appears with the extended title of *A New Hope*. This extended version of the title was only added on its third re-release on 10th April 1981.

call to adventure, also a common trait in the myth of the hero's journey. Ben (Obi-Wan), who will assume the archetypal role of mentor, is ready to point out that the opinions Luke expresses are not his own, but his uncle's. The catalyst that will fuel Luke's decision to embark on his journey will be the murder of his aunt and uncle.

As Ben, Luke and the droids reach Mos Eisley, the city where they expect to find transportation to Alderaan, after having discovered that R2-D2 contains information that might prove critical in the struggle against the Empire, they are entering what Joseph Campbell referred to as the "threshold crossing" (*Star Wars The Legacy Revealed*). It is here that Luke realizes that he is out of his depth. He still needs to mature if he is to become what is expected of him. We are given a fleeting notion that in the *Star Wars* universe there is also racism when Wuher, the cantina's bartender, refuses entrance to the droids "we don't serve their kind". This is just a casual side glance at recently segregationist problems in the USA. Another scene brimming with racism in *Star Wars* is the one where Luke and Han, disguised as Stormtroopers, are supposedly taking Chewbacca from one containment cell to another on board the Death Star (but with the disguised purpose of rescuing princess Leia). As the door of the elevator where they are opens, a noticeably disgusted Imperial officer asks the supposed Stormtroopers where they were taking "that thing", referring to the Wookie. Other life forms are notoriously deemed by the Empire as inferior (all the followers of the Empire are humanoid, in appearance at least if not in their ethics). The homogeneity of the Empire is in deep contrast to the diversity which is embraced by the Rebels, as guardians of the Old Republic. Several species work together to attain the higher purpose of returning peace and democracy to the galaxy. This zoological difference we discover in the *Star Wars* universe is parallel to a desirable inter-mingling of racial and ethnical groups on Earth. Another interesting fact is that there are no women associated with the Empire (at least, not in the films). This may be because women are associated with bearing life and the lack of respect for other people's lives that the Empire demonstrates seems to be incompatible with motherhood.

Shortly after having entered the cantina at Mos Eisley a shady character called Dr. Evazan seconded by an alien vaguely resembling a walrus, Ponda Baba, an Aqualish from the home world of Ando, picks on Luke forcing Ben to wield his lightsaber so that he can save the youth. We have the first real evidence of the blunt effectiveness of the lightsaber. But only after having mastered the Force will Luke be able to gain similar skill in the use

of such a pseudo-ancient weapon, fruit of a much more “civilized time” (Ben Kenobi). This is one of the first tests Luke will have to face, if he is to achieve his goal and become the classic hero, much like Greek myth where a prevalent motive is that of the hero being tested. Luke must rescue the princess in distress; attack the Death Star; take part in the battle of Hoth at the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back*, rescue his friends from Jabba the Hutt, in *Return of the Jedi*. But most of all his biggest test, his most feared challenge, will be to face down his own father: Darth Vader.

At the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back* we gain knowledge that Luke has risen in the hosts of the Rebel forces for he is now known as “Commander Skywalker”. Clearly his position has improved after Luke’s performance at the battle of Yavin, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Death Star, by his own hand.

After the defeat of the first group of fighters lead by the Garven Dreis, the Red Leader, at the hands of Darth Vader, Luke chooses to voluntarily disengage the targeting computer system of his X-wing fighter, causing panic in the Rebel base as the last chance to destroy the Death Star seemed to have vanished into thin air. Against all odds, he manages to hit a direct bull’s-eye; trusting the Force to guide his actions proves the right course of action. This action sequence is reminiscent of the biblical tale of David and Goliath and establishes empathy from the audiences’ point of view for the Rebel cause. Once again what we have here is a cautionary parable from Lucas concerning the excessive dependence on technology. Tuning to a higher spirituality is much more fruitful than blind faith in machines. According to Pollock, “Lucas wanted to return to more traditional values that held a special appeal for our rootless society” (Pollock, 1990: 139) getting reacquainted with our spirituality seems to be one of the values he would like to reinstate, hence Lev’s affirmation that Lucas’s future is a conservative one (Lev, 2000: 165).

When in the Cloud City of Bespin Luke duels with Vader, he is not only no match for his opponent’s fighting skills, because he has left Dagobah in a hurry, after having foreseen the future where his friends were in peril, consequently not finishing his training. He is also unprepared for the truth Vader is about to share with him. In the most climatic scene of the trilogy, audiences discover that Vader is his father. Both Ben and Yoda have chosen to shelter Luke from the cruel truth. Even the dismemberment which Luke suffers at the hands of Vader at the end of *Empire Strikes Back* seems to be less painful than his discovery of the filial bond that unites him to the villain. Vader, however, only wants Luke

for his potential to use the Force “Join me and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son.” At this moment Luke is faced with an even thornier dilemma. If on the one hand he “not only faces the archetypal challenge of not succumbing to the dark side of the Force,” on the other “he faces the more personal one of not ending up like his father” (Galipeau, 2001: 163). Luke is faced with a two-sided dilemma: he can either defy his father’s authority, and forfeit his love or succumb to it and thereby repeat his tragic mistakes.

When Vader is extending his hand, reaching for Luke he is proposing to assume the role of mentor himself. However, contrary to Yoda or even Ben, he leaves no room for Luke for personal growth or ethical discovery; instead he claims to know of Luke’s destiny. He’s only interested in Luke for personal benefit, possibly even to overthrow the Emperor, governing the galaxy by brutal force and fear.

Knowledge of this fact causes Luke to fall into an abyss, paralleled by his physical plummeting into the shaft, where the certainties he had vanished because of the overwhelming truth. This way of escaping the clutches of Vader post shadows Luke’s attempt to ignore the truth about his father. Yoda’s fear of Luke’s impetuosity proves to be a valid one, for even in spite of his physical and mental conditioning in Dagobah, Luke is at a most susceptible stage in his development where he can easily be goaded into following the promptings of his father towards the dark side.

Galipeau sees Luke’s falling into the abyss as immersion in a symbolic fabric. It resonates with strong rebirth imagery (the metal chute is a visual metaphor for the birth canal) where falling equals “letting go of the old ways of doing things in order for more creative and grounded ways of being to emerge” (Galipeau, 2001: 165). Confrontation with such a crushing truth will cause Luke to be reborn, or at least to grow up with such an astonishing swiftness that it will allow him to survive despite the overwhelming odds. When he emerges from the tunnel he hangs on an antenna, “as vulnerable and alone as a newborn infant”(Galipeau, 2001: 165), symptomatically his first reaction is to climb back inside, as if unconsciously he is trying to return to a period of time prior to that in which he was confronted with the truth. Of course, the hatch will not open, there is no way that he can turn back time, or erase the knowledge that Vader is his father.

The only way for Luke to surpass the fearful difficulties which lay ahead of him is with the help from his friends. Once again the theme of friendship is quite prominent as one of Lucas’s concerns. The hero cannot overcome the trials which lay ahead of him

without the strong bonds of brotherhood. A parallel could be drawn with Frodo, the lead character of the *Lord of the Rings*, who could never have been able to achieve the task of destroying the ring of power were it not for the rest of members of the fellowship of the ring. When Luke reaches out with the Force, Leia tunes into his thoughts and orders Chewbacca and Lando to turn the Millennium Falcon around so that she can save him. Ironically Luke, who had abandoned his training prior to its conclusion in order to save his friends, finds himself being saved instead. There is still a long way for him to go to become what is expected of him. As Sansweet puts it he must become “the only man alive who could reignite the flame of the mystical Jedi knights.” (Sansweet, 1998: 271)

But escape from the Empire’s reach proves more difficult than what is expected for the Millennium Falcon, according to Galipeau, “a vessel not only of rescue but also of transformation” (Galipeau, 2001: 166), is in danger from being pulled by a tractor beam which will prove fatal. This author affirms that Luke’s desire to help others “indicates a need for further self-recognition” (Galipeau, 2001: 166). This need almost gets him killed and is clearly a sign that the character needs to mature. At the offset of the confrontation with Vader, Luke cannot help but feel disappointed with Ben because he hasn’t told him the truth, at least not the entire truth. The tractor beam symbolizes the negative father complex that so vividly imprisons Luke, forcing him to feel an attraction to Vader, his father, a person “who in every other way he despises” (Galipeau, 2001: 167).

The ending of *Empire Strikes Back* sees Luke at a Rebel Star Cruiser being grafted with a bionic hand tested by the medical droid 2-1B. According to Galipeau “we witness the regeneration of Luke’s ability to grasp and get a hold of things” (Galipeau, 2001: 168). Denying the truth is not a valid strategy. Luke must devise a different one if he is to dream of success in his undertaking. Still coming to terms with all the ramifications of his recent discoveries, there is a sense of mission which engulfs the final moments of the film. The final confrontation with Vader hasn’t taken place yet, but Luke must embark on a rescue mission because Han has been frozen in carbonite and taken to Jabba the Hutt’s palace to be displayed as a trophy.

Return of the Jedi sees an astonishing metamorphosis in Luke’s character. From the naïve farm boy in *Star Wars*, he develops into the Jedi knight we now encounter. Even his robes have suffered a truly dramatic change. He starts with mainly white garments that he wears in Tatooine. I see his robes as a visual metaphor for Luke’s personality, he reflects

naïveté. We need only to pay close attention to the eagerness with which he absorbs knowledge from Ben Kenobi to understand how desperate the boy is for a role model. He can follow a multiplicity of paths, this white robed youth can assume a personality corresponding to all the different tonalities later on in his life (the absence of color which may lead to multiple chromatic ramifications.) On the other hand white is also symbolic of virginal purity, naïveté, qualities a young farm boy from a backwater planet such as Tatooine evidently sports. Of course white was also chosen for practical reasons, namely as a way to repel the scorching heat from the twin suns which have transformed Tatooine into a desert planet.

At the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back*, we see Luke dressed, once again in white/grey, but this time the general notion is to use these colors as camouflage on the surface of the ice planet of Hoth, as the rebels try to escape the clutches of the Empire. Later on in Dagobah, his attire will be tan, which is perfectly in tune with the marshland which this planet is supposed to be. It is as if Luke is trying to fit in with the dense vegetation he encounters there. Once again he is seeking his place in the world (or in this case the different worlds he rummages through), trying to adapt to hostile environments, the maturation process he goes through is not an easy one, a lot is expected of him if he is to become an heroic figure.

In *Return of the Jedi* Luke sports a full black garment. He has come to embrace his destiny and he carries on his shoulders the weight of the knowledge of his lineage. But, instead of denying it like he did in *The Empire Strikes Back*, he chooses to embrace it, admitting Vader is his father, and through this admission gaining some leverage over his father and ultimately bringing him back to the light side of the Force, redeeming him.

In the final battle on the moon of Endor, the Emperor's attempted manipulation of Luke is obvious, much like what he's done with his father. He tries to clear the way for the young warrior's hate and anger, making him lose touch with his individual resolve, and consequently embrace the Dark side of the Force, the path of the Sith. His attunement with the Force (in his case the dark side) obliges him to understand the power the Skywalker family holds.

But the change that Luke has undergone is much more profound than his garment. He has significantly grown into full adulthood, and is en route to achieve his purpose of becoming a Jedi knight. The hero's journey is almost at an end, only the inevitable

confrontation with Vader remains as an obstacle for the circle to be complete. The inevitable clash between father and son begins with the continuous taunting of the Emperor. However Luke shows the maturity of his character, not being controlled by rage or desire for revenge, so he declines to continue his battle with his father switching off his lightsaber. Vader, imbued with a newfound respect for his opponent, declares “Obi-Wan has taught you well”, apparently oblivious to Yoda’s role in the training of his son. After stating that he will not fight his father, Luke sets about his effort to redeem him “I feel the good in you...the conflict.” he says. Curiously, in the end, it won’t be any superior power or skills that will save him, but his faith in his father, faith that deep inside there is still good ready to be released. Galipeau acknowledges the fact that Luke introduces an important psychological insight into Vader: “If we can consciously own our warring emotions and admit how they pull us in different directions, we can make choices that do not cause harm to others.” (Galipeau, 2001: 239) Luke’s self-confidence is further demonstrated.

Unfortunately, just as Obi-Wan had previously predicted and warned Luke he should hide his feelings for they did give him credit, but ended up bringing more harm than good. Vader reaches out to Luke, using his Force-enhanced mind to tap into Luke’s sources of concern, which were his friends and particularly his twin sister (Leia). Vader’s discovery foreshadows Obi-Wan’s total failure, for if Luke won’t turn to the dark side perhaps his sister will. Once again we are shown that for the ruthless empire individuality is readily sacrificed just as long as the general purpose is obtained, in this case the perpetuation of power. Luke is trapped in a situation in which his determination is completely undermined as the threat to his sister is voiced by Vader. This threat unleashes his fury which will only abate after he has managed to force Vader to fall against a railing and even then only after he has inflicted upon his father the same wound that Vader had previously inflicted upon him in their bout in the Cloud City of Bespin. The dismemberment shows a bionic stump, symbol of the loss of humanity that his character has undergone.

It is the realization that he has already become so similar to his father (he takes a long stare at his own bionic hand and Vader’s stump) that will make Luke pause. The Oedipal castration of Luke’s individuality is, at this stage, paramount. It’s up to him to invert this situation. Once again he gathers himself and proclaims that the Emperor has failed, “I’ll never turn to the dark side,” “You’ve failed, Your Highness. I am a Jedi, like

my father before me.” In stating his moral principles out loud Luke manages to hold on to his humanity, and forces the Emperor to use a new strategy, convinced as he now is truly a Jedi and will not be deviated from his path. From trying to convert him Palpatine is compelled to change his strategy and destroy him. Electric bolts of energy appear from his hand and envelop Luke, slowly draining his life away. Galipeau offers the explanation for the discharge of the Emperor’s wrath through electrifying bolts as symbolizing “his loss of his own humanity and his total identification with the dark side of the archetypal masculine energy seen in such mythological figures as Zeus, Yahweh, and Odin” (Galipeau, 2001: 243).

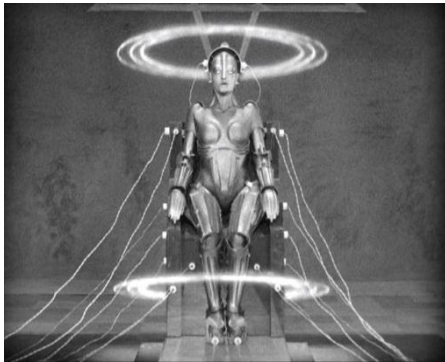
In his pain Luke cries out to his father to help him. Even in the most dire of moments his faith hasn’t dissipated and the conflict in Vader is quite patent as his stare deviates from his son to his master and then to his son again. In the end Luke’s faith will pay off for Vader will be responsible for the demise of the Emperor. In the most crucial of moments he seizes his master, lifts him over his head and throws him into a shaft situated in the throne room. The shaft is of course symbolic of the abyss the Emperor has fallen into due to his corruption.

Ultimately Luke’s purpose has been achieved, he has managed to redeem his father. Michelle Kinnucan writes in her article “The Myth of Redemptive Violence”, which can be found in *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise. Fans, Merchandise and Critics*, that here we have a recreation of the “archaic myth of creation through destruction” (Kapell, 2006: 9). The violent action of Vader, destroying the evil Emperor, will allow not only his son to survive, but also for a new order to spawn. She also encounters a similar resurgence of the myth in the destruction of both of the Death Stars. It can be determined then that in Lucas’s universe democracy is born from an act of violence. The forceful deposition of the tyrant leads the way for a democratic form of government in this galaxy far away.

R2-D2 and C-3P0, much more than comic relief

When Lucas conceived R2-D2 (Kenny Baker) and C-3P0 (Anthony Daniels) he came up with the notion that these two droids should reflect very distinct personalities. In

fact Pollock states that the origin for the name of the smaller droid R2-D2, goes back to the time when Lucas was at the stage of mixing the sound for *American Graffiti*, “Walter Murch had asked him for R2, D2 (Reel 2, Dialogue 2) of the film, and Lucas liked the abbreviated sound of R2-D2” (Pollock, 1990: 141-142). Visually speaking, C-3P0 was mainly inspired by the character of the robot Maria in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927). Ralph McQuarrie’s early sketches for the pair of droids demonstrate proximity between the two characters.



The robot created to impersonate the character of Maria in *Metropolis*



Early Ralph McQuarrie original concept for C-3P0 and R2-D2.

In the opening scene of *Star Wars*, as Imperial Stormtroopers are about to board the Rebel vessel, Tantive IV, and the damage caused by the blasters of the Star Destroyer is shown, we are introduced to the pair of droids. C-3P0’s opening whining is symptomatic of his adventure-fearing personality: “Did you hear that? They shut down the main reactor. We will be destroyed for sure! This is madness! We’re doomed...” After all the protocol droid might be fluent in “over six billion forms of communication” but he prefers to pass on the thrills of adventurous endeavors, showing emotions of fear and deep concern. R2-D2, on the other hand, seems to be much more focused on his mission; he is supposed to deliver a message to a general Kenobi, a name which doesn’t seem the least bit familiar to C-3P0.

Even considering the sensitive secrets which were involved (the births of Luke and Leia), the fact that their memories were wiped reflects the view that they weren’t deemed capable of keeping a secret, were they ever to fall in the hands of the Empire. This being

said, the personality traits shown by the two droids as in much 1980's and 1990's sci-fi, can draw us into the larger consideration of what is and what is not humanity.

Robert Arp, in chapter 10 “«If Droids could think...»: droids as Slaves and Persons”, which can be found in *Star Wars and Philosophy: More powerful than you can possibly imagine*, when addressing this theme, and focusing on the work of philosopher John Locke, states that:

“A person is a being who has the capacity for (1) reason or rationality; (2) mental states like beliefs, intentions, desires and emotions; (3) language; (4) entering into social relationships with other persons; and (5) being considered a responsible moral agent.”

(Decker, 2005: 121)

Please note that in the five characteristics chosen to define the quality of personhood, the existence of a physical body does not figure, meaning that philosophically speaking it is possible for an entity which wasn't born, but was instead created to become a person (Decker, 2005: 121). He assumes that if cognitive capacities are what it takes to define a person, then R2-D2 and C-3P0 should be deemed people (Decker, 2005: 122) but with the problem of their rights not being properly addressed. Arp argues that “The case can be made that droids are an oppressed group in the *Star Wars* galaxy” (Decker, 2005: 131). Even so, the Rebels seem to be the group of biological entities who treat the droids with the highest degree of respect. Luke converses amicably with R2-D2 on their way to the Dagobah system, where he is to rendezvous with Yoda.

A notion which has been amply explored in science fiction is one where robots have striven to attain the status of the human, consider for example Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), the futuristic crime story which reinvents noir; Mamoru Oshii's, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), the dystopian Manga movie which opened the entire genre to new audiences or Steven Spielberg's *Artificial Intelligence, A.I.*(2001), which sees Haley Joel Osmet play the role of an advanced robot which longs to become human so he can regain the love of his mother. But perhaps nowhere is this line of thought more amply pursued than in Isaac Asimov's collection of short stories *The Complete Robot*, where robots are subjected to the three laws of robotics.

Dennis Wood, in his article *The Stars in our Hearts – A Critical Commentary On George Lucas's Star Wars* argues that Ben Kenobi works with the droids as his equals from the first time he sets eyes on them. Notice the affectionate way in which he addresses R2-D2 the first time he sees the opinionated droid on Tatooine: "Hello there. Come here my little friend. There's nothing to be afraid of" thus gaining the audience's "unqualified respect" (Wood, 1978: 267) A similar affection for the droids seems to be shared by the director of the film who "endows the droids with more characteristics of the living than many of his humans" (Wood, 1978: 267). An issue which still lacks resolution is the fact that the once Jedi master turned hermit doesn't seem to recognize either of the droids who have accompanied him on so many previous adventures. This proves to be a small glitch in the continuity of the narrative; after all bridging the gap between the two trilogies wasn't an easy task.

Elvis Mitchell in the documentary *Star Wars The Legacy Revealed* establishes a comparison between R2-D2 and C-3PO and the comic duo, Laurel and Hardy; he says they represent the "Knockabout stuff of old films". Hanson also establishes the unlikely pair as a "classic manifestation of the comedic "straight man and funny man" technique that is used in so many different films" (Hanson, 2002: 417). On the other hand, Mitchell grants the mechanical characters the attribute of adding framing and perspective to the action. In this particular dimension they serve the role of the Greek chorus whose role was to comment on the action.

Following the notion that the metal duo does indeed bring comic relief to the action packed sequences, this might explain why the clumsy Gungan, Jar Jar Binks, was introduced into *The Phantom Menace* by Lucas but was so poorly received by fans of the original saga. His role as comic relief was redundant for the function had been so well performed by the bickering droids in the first trilogy. Of course offering such a simple explanation for the lack of approval Jar Jar evoked seems to be rather simplistic. Galipeau notes that Jar Jar Binks is a "highly ambivalent character", "...his own people don't like him, and, at first neither do the Jedi. Thus, it is not surprising that many viewers didn't like Jar Jar either" (Galipeau, 2001: 266). He argues that he "...becomes a 'hook' for people's projections of their own unconscious racial stereotypes" (Galipeau, 2001: 266). The character's voice seems to resemble an accent identified with the Caribbean, when noticing Binks has an awkward personality, one might extrapolate that all characters with similar

accents might have equal character traits. Please note that a similar polemic was raised when James Earl Jones was cast as the actor who voiced Darth Vader. In the former case however, the fact which seemed to create such a controversy was the clumsy nature of the character, after all he was banished from Oto Gunga, the principal Gungan underwater city for being clumsy. Galipeau sympathizes with this character, for he argues that “Jar Jar Binks captures the vulnerability, awkwardness and naiveté that children and adolescents feel and try to hide for fear of being shamed, ridiculed and ostracized” (Galipeau, 2001: 266) Personally I believe that by including a character such as Binks, Lucas is making a concession to a much younger audience than he was targeting with the first trilogy. Of course, the fans who were old enough to have watched the films of the original trilogy on their first theatrical release would naturally feel somewhat disconnected from such a character.

Michael J. Hanson stresses the fact that “as conveyors of the myth to the audience, the droids of *Star Wars* represent the classic mythical muse” (Hanson, 2002: 416) It is curious that Hanson establishes that through their own peculiar way of expressing themselves and experiencing what is going on around them the droids “bring out the humanity of this foreign galaxy and make the story accessible to the audience” (Hanson, 2002: 416). He adds that such a role was traditionally reserved for the muse who would “recite a classical myth, with emphasis on themes that would please the audience” (Hanson, 2002: 416). Galipeau also establishes C-3P0, from the very beginning, as “the narrator and the commentator of this adventure” (Galipeau, 2001: 19). Perhaps the scene in which the retelling of the story by C-3P0 is most evident is when the droid retells the adventures of the rebels to the tribe of Ewoks, on Endor in *Return of the Jedi*, complete with sound effects to emphasize the most dramatic moments. His retelling of the tales was so compelling and vivid that he managed to secure the support of influential characters in the Ewok tribe for the battle to come. By telling the rebels’ tale to a primitive society such as that of the Ewoks the droid imbued the rebels’ feats with a mythical dimension which might bear out J.G. Frazier’s theory, which considers myth as a part of primitive religion. According to Bronislaw Malinowski myth is a way for “primitives [to] seek to control nature rather than to explain it” (Segal, 2004: 27). In this sense, having met directly with the golden god revered in their mythical traditions, the Ewoks would be able control the

physical world and procure a favorable outcome in their fight with the Empire. In this particular case myth elicited courage from the Ewoks.

The battle of Endor, vital for the fate of the Rebellion since on Endor is situated the shield generator which protects the second Death Star, echoes many other Hollywood battle stories where on opposing sides we can find two very different foes, one of them being much more technologically developed than the other. However, if there is an environmental message in *Return of the Jedi*, it is a very timid one. One cannot help but realize that the presence of the Empire, with its heavy dependence on technology (from speeder bikes to AT-STs or larger AT-ATs, to the structure of the shield generator itself), will necessarily cause change to a naturally balanced ecosystem, which Endor appears to be. The theme of eco-terrorism or environmental abuse is much more fully addressed in James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), where greedy humans are willing to ravage the land for mineral wealth, a land which is deemed sacred for the indigenous people of the Na'vi, on the distant planet of Pandora.

The droids elicit in audiences feelings of compassion, humor and familiarity. They genuinely seem to "feel" fear, regret (when C-3P0 choses the incorrect path just to prove R2-D2 is wrong in his assertions), a sense of duty, which transcends any "normal" programming and stretches to blatant stubbornness (R2-D2, when he seems to be compelled to deliver his message to Obi Wan Kenobi). But altruism is also displayed when C-3P0 would happily donate some of his parts to R2-D2, after the battle of Yavin, showing the bond which has been created between the two droids. Compare Hanson's approach to the characters with Robert Arp's argument that the droids should be "deemed as people". Galipeau argues on this subject that "We soon see that these droids are more "human" – that is, involved in the unfolding drama in an alive and adventurous way – than many of the human figures – who are actually more robotic." (Galipeau, 2001: 15) A direct correspondence could be established with the character of Vader, who has lost most of his humanity, not only by creating a "symbiotic relationship" with his suit, the physical support which allows him to keep on living, but also by emotionally neglecting his humanity as a way to cope with the pain of his loss.

But regarding the two droids as simply "comic relief" is reductive for they often take a leading role in saving the rebels from the clutches of the Empire. R2-D2 is directly responsible for shutting down the garbage compactor in which Han, Luke, Leia and

Chewbacca are locked, in *Star Wars* and consequentially saving them from a grizzly death. He's also responsible for repairing the hyperdrive on the Millennium Falcon in *The Empire Strikes Back*, thus enabling the Rebels to once again escape Vader's Star Destroyer. In *Return of the Jedi* the chromed head of the droid is the perfect hiding place for Luke's lightsaber, which will prove instrumental in his own liberation as well as that of his friends'. In *The Phantom Menace*, he is responsible for saving Queen Amidala's Royal Starship when it only barely manages to escape the blockade of the Trade Federation to the planet of Naboo. In *Revenge of the Sith*, R2-D2 is responsible for saving Anakin's Jedi Starfighter from a vicious buzz droid. This striking number of heroic deeds is also not to mention that which started the whole sequence of events told on the first movie; it was in his memory bank that the secret plans for the Death Star were inserted by Princess Leia. The array of gadgets which seem to be logged inside the small metal body of the droid seem to be limitless and Lucas capitalized on this feature with the TV spot promoting *Attack of the Clones*, presenting the character as the robotic equivalent of a Swiss Army Knife, including anti-gravity boosters which enable the droid to fly.

The Role of mentor in the *Star Wars* saga

Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi

Throughout the *Star Wars* saga several characters act as mentors. In *Star Wars* the first character to assume this role is Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi, played by Sir Alec Guinness in the original trilogy and Ewan McGregor in the more recent one. Later the character of Yoda (Frank Oz) also adopts the role of Luke's mentor in *The Empire Strikes Back*. In the later trilogy Obi-Wan takes (although reluctantly) another apprentice, Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd), but not before he is himself shown as a Padawan learner of Jedi master Qui-Gon Jin (Liam Neeson).

Growing up on the desert world of Tatooine, without a father figure, Luke is in dire need of a role model and mentor. Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan and Yoda share the role of mentor in the *Star Wars* saga. They give philosophical and spiritual guidance to the hero, often possessing extraordinary power, almost magical in its strangeness, representing a lifetime

of discipline, study and acquired knowledge. Obi-Wan specifically has the role of opening the door for Luke to a much larger world, the mystical world of the Force, assuming the role of mentor, much like Gandalf in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic adventure *Lord of the Rings* assumes the role of mentor to Frodo.

The word *mentor* derives its origin from the classical character Mentor in Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus's friend who is left by the hero to take care of his son Telemachus when he embarks on his journey. Of course mentors don't always correspond to the expectations heroes have of them. Such is the case when Luke first encounters Yoda on Dagobah; the uncanny Jedi master must hold a conversation with the spirit of Obi-Wan for the youth to realize who stands before him. Such is also the case with Achilles, who finds in the centaur Chiron a knowledgeable tutor.

In mythological tradition the mentor presents the hero with a special gift. Obi-Wan gives Luke his father's lightsaber. The lightsaber can be considered to have a double symbolism: first it represents the light that will inevitably cut the darkness which surrounds the character of the hero and it will also provide precious help as a weapon in the agitated times that will follow. The lightsaber is a weapon which can obviously cut through as can discernment, perhaps Ben's greatest gift to Luke. A parallel is easily drawn with the mythological figure of King Arthur who earns the right to wield Excalibur as a defining tool in fulfilling his destiny and becoming king and leading the people.

Galipeau considers one of the most important aspects of the symbolism of the Force to be the fact that Jedi knights encompass two archetypal figures: the knight and the priest. "In the Middle Ages knights were the active fighting figures in the world, while the priests were the caretakers of souls. In the Jedi knights both roles are joined" (Galipeau, 2001: 29-30). Hanson on the other hand considers "Obi-Wan is the perfect embodiment of chivalric ideals to Luke, who will emulate Obi-Wan in his conduct once he reaches maturity as a Jedi" (Hanson, 2002: 400). When entering the cantina in Mos Eisley, Luke immediately attracts unwanted attention from Dr. Evazan, and Ponda Baba, who start a quarrel with him. Ben intervenes offering to appease the belligerent twosome with a beverage, only resorting to violence when his first approach seems to have utterly failed. Later in *Return of the Jedi* after Luke had furthered his training with Yoda, when he plots to free his friend Han Solo from the gangster Jabba the Hut, his first tactic is to barter with the crime lord;

only when this tactic fails does he choose a confrontational path, in this way emulating his mentor.

Hanson considers “Obi-Wan and the Jedi act much like classical knights of Arthurian myth” (Hanson, 2002: 399) whose tasks include in *The Phantom Menace* to protect Queen Amidala, the ruler of Naboo. It is the character of Qui-Gon Jin who states that he can protect the queen, but not fight a war for her. Hanson states that the Jedi “...use the light side of the Force in order to be the guardians of peace and justice in the galaxy” (Hanson, 2002: 401). This being so, the Jedi would assume a role similar to that of the western sheriffs.

“Kenobi also befriended a youngster named Anakin Skywalker, who was strong with the Force. Obi-Wan took on Skywalker’s training himself, but through his lack of experience as a teacher and his proud refusal to seek help or advice – combined with Skywalker’s strong will – Kenobi failed to see how Anakin was being lured closer and closer to the dark side of the force.”

(Sansweet, 1998: 161)

Curiously the publication of *The Star Wars Encyclopedia* precedes the actual release of the film in which these events are narrated (*Revenge of the Sith*) by seven years, so there are many details which have become outdated, but the general notion is that there is much for Obi-Wan to come to terms with regarding his role of mentor of the first generation of Skywalkers. Hanson goes one step further when he states that there is still guilt plaguing Obi-Wan’s mind because of his failure with his first apprentice, Anakin. When he sacrifices himself in the Death Star, willfully neglecting to shield himself against one of Vader’s vicious attacks, Hanson suggests that this “...explains a sense of responsibility (and perhaps even guilt) that he feels” (Hanson, 2002: 401).

It has been frequently argued that *Star Wars* deals with the motif of redemption, that Luke is ultimately capable of redeeming his father, seeing through the mask and the machine which have come to define Vader as the enforcer of the Empire. Hanson advances a new line of thought; if Luke is capable of defeating Vader, he will also provide Obi-Wan with the desired redemption. “For if Luke can destroy Vader, Obi-Wan’s burden is finally extinguished” (Hanson, 2002: 401). Ben’s sacrifice attests to the nobility of his character,

but it also resonates with the sacrifice of Christ, who chose to sacrifice himself for the greater good of mankind. In *Revenge of the Sith* you can also witness the nobility of character of a young Padawan learner, named Zett Jukassa (Jett Lucas), who fights valiantly against many of Vader's 501st legion clone troopers, enabling Bail Organa to escape the massacre at the Jedi Temple.

When Luke painfully discovers in the Cloud City of Bespin that Vader is, in fact, his father, he feels betrayed by his mentor, who has kept from him such an Earth-shattering truth. Obi-Wan, however doesn't believe he has lied for he believes Anakin is truly dead and that which remains of him is no longer human, but a corrupted machine instead: Vader. This point in the narrative establishes an essential divergence between Obi-Wan's thoughts and those of Luke. Obi-Wan believes killing Vader is a necessity, while Luke still nourishes the thought that his father can be redeemed. Of course his discernment cannot be deemed as objective. Ultimately it is he who is right, his faith and filial love will not only save his life but set the whole galaxy free from the nefarious influence of Emperor Palpatine.

Yoda

The character of Yoda provides the *Star Wars* universe with a sense of pluralism. Although the Empire might be crushing of one's individuality, inasmuch as its foot soldiers (Stormtroopers) wear masks which hide their identities, not to mention Vader, of course, the Rebels accept multiple life forms into their ranks, accepting different types of knowledge, which contribute to the same cause, the ultimate liberation of the galaxy. Yoda surprises not only his unsuspecting visitor in Dagobah, but also the entire audience. *Muppets* pioneer Frank Oz, who is responsible for handling the puppet of Yoda on *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, and also the voice of the character in the most recent trilogy, is responsible together with Jim Henson for directing *The Dark Crystal* (1982), which also features puppet work from Tim Rose (who plays the role of Admiral Ackbar on *Return of the Jedi*) and Toby Philpott (who is one of the three individuals who is responsible for giving life to Jabba the Hut, in his case he was in charge of moving the

crime lord's left hand, his head and tongue). This film also features technology used on the character of Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Attack of the Clones deserves a reference in the development of the character of Yoda. For the first time the pointy-eared Jedi master is a computer-generated image. Extensive research was done by the technicians at Industrial Lights and Magic trying to reproduce the exact movements Frank Oz made with his hand as he handled the puppet of Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back*. The first attempts proved unsuccessful because the digital character didn't resemble a puppet as much as it should, consequently it didn't look real. In the documentary *From Puppets to Pixels*, Lucas expresses his desire that the audience of the film should believe that they were, in fact, seeing a puppet in the film so that they would get a genuine surprise when the fight sequence between Yoda and Count Dooku happens. Of course the rebirth of the character as CGI made it possible for the little green Jedi master to move in an absolutely unexpected manner.

So far Yoda had never been really seen immersed in the action, even if at the beginning of the film Anakin remarks he can rival master Yoda in the use of the lightsaber (only to be immediately refuted by Obi-Wan). The astonishing speed with which Yoda jumps around from one place to another makes him a truly formidable adversary.

This fighting sequence was designed to surpass the battle of *The Phantom Menace*, between Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon and Darth Maul. Lucas always tries to surprise his audiences, and quite honestly there doesn't seem to be much improvement possible in terms of the ferocity of the final struggle from Episode I between Qui-Gon Jinn, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Maul. So the logical way to go was a computer-generated battle. Christopher Lee, who plays the role of Count Dooku remarks that having taken part in many battles in the celluloid universe in the past, it all came down to performing. With the advent of CGI his task becomes considerably harder so he needs to rely so much more on his ability to perform because he's doing it in front a blank, green screen, his opponent will only later be added to the scene. He also adds that this fight sequences is greater than anything he'd ever been involved in (Lee, *From Puppets to Pixels*).

Although I've never seen reference of the fact in any of the books or sources I've consulted, for me Yoda looks considerably older in *The Phantom Menace* than he looks in *Attack of the Clones*, I guess there is a price to pay when you start with a rubber character and you turn it into a digital one in the middle of the story. Of course the new trilogy is

highly prolific when it comes to the introduction of digital characters, from the controversial Jar Jar Binks to Dexter Jettster, Obi-Wan's unconventional source of information. But of course those characters had their genesis as computer-generated images, so there is no continuity problem to be resolved.

Qui-Gon Jinn

Liam Neeson gives life to the Jedi master character capturing a strong willfulness which becomes a trademark of the rogue Jedi. We learn from Obi-Wan that his stubbornness has already cost him a place in the Jedi High Council (the highest ruling organ in the Jedi Order and more or less the equivalent to the Knights of the Round Table in Celtic mythology), since he has previously defied the wishes of that assembly of Jedi masters. However this does not seem to bother the Jedi much, for he feels he must follow his own path, often favoring risk and action. Qui-Gon is aware Obi-Wan will be a much wiser Jedi knight than he is; he foresees Obi-Wan will become a great Jedi knight. His impetuosity leads him to recognize in the young slave Anakin Skywalker a personification for the ancient myth of the one who would bring balance to the Force. "When Jinn encounters young Anakin Skywalker, he strongly believes he has discovered the prophesied individual who will bring balance to the Force" (Kapell, 2006: 147). When questioning the will of the Force in facilitating his encounter with young Anakin, Qui-Gon opens a debate on an interesting dichotomy in the *Star Wars* saga, destiny versus free will. He couldn't possibly foresee the consequences of his actions once he had vowed to train young Anakin as his Padawan learner, for before bringing balance to the Force, this youth will almost destroy the Jedi Order; consequently the boy could be perceived as a false messiah. In effect Jinn's clash with the Sith apprentice, Darth Maul, costs him his life, but Obi-Wan promises that he will be the one who will carry on the wish of his master and train the boy in the ways of the Jedi. As stated previously Obi-Wan assumes the role of mentor to Anakin in a reluctant fashion, not out of genuine conviction but of duty towards his fallen master.

Qui-Gon Jinn was Padawan to Count Dooku, which might help to explain some of his headstrongness and the frequent clashes with the Jedi High Council. It is also mentioned that he was the first Jedi to “live on in the Force, a gift he will pass on to Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda and Anakin Skywalker” (Kapell, 2006: 147). Even after his death, Obi-Wan’s spirit frequently contacts Luke giving him sound advice such as for example at the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back* after Luke had been attacked by the Wampa (ice creature) and barely managed to escape, it is Obi-Wan’s spirit that tells him he must further his knowledge in the ways of the Force in Dagobah with Yoda. Taping into the Spirituality of the Force offers Luke answers his former life could never have.

Anakin Skywalker vs. Darth Vader: from fall to redemption

When Peter Lev affirms that “*Star Wars* advocates a return to heroism and traditional morality” he is, in fact, asserting that Lucas takes the opportunity that science fiction gives him to rewrite the past, getting “the basic moral precepts right this time” (Lev, 2000: 179). He establishes Lucas as a conservative in his way of envisioning the future. Conservatism dictates that traditional moral values such as honor, loyalty, courage, chivalry and courteousness be disseminated and the way Lucas imagined spreading those values was through the viewpoint of two generations of the same family, comprising the rise, fall and ultimately rise again of the Skywalker family in the galactic narrative which is told in *Star Wars*.

When Darth Vader first sets foot on the Rebel ship at the beginning of *Star Wars*, audiences immediately see him for what he is: the ruthless enforcer of the tyrannical political power represented by the Empire. Not ranking first among the Imperial officers which dwell in the environment recreated by the Death Star, his attire and posture grant him a unique place within the highly stratified order that the Empire’s autocratic rule promotes. After all, Princess Leia doesn’t express too much surprise when she discovers that Grand Moff Tarkin (Peter Cushing) is leading the mission which has resulted in her imprisonment. From the very beginning, audiences are shown Vader is the embodiment of evil, but “although evil, it is an evil we can see in ourselves, inherent in the very possibility of life, and this distances him from technocrats who have foresworn life for machines”

(Kapell, 2006: 266). The Sith lord from the very start of the film shows he likes to take matters into his own hands. He leads the boarding party on Tantive Four, and later in the film, when Imperials discover that the turbo lasers which equip the Death Star are ineffective against such small ships as fighters, he leads the group of Tie fighters in his hunt for the rebel pilots. Consequently this character reveals a unique personality trait: he is idiosyncratic but tenacious in the pursuit of his objectives.

Of course confronting this dark lord will represent a critical part of Luke's journey if he is to succeed as a hero. Often in mythical tales obstacles are put in the path of the hero so that he can prove his worth; take for example the many ordeals that Odysseus had to overcome before returning to Ithaca to his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus in *The Odyssey*. The idea of complete fearlessness is utterly seductive for any child; this might help to explain some of the popularity Vader has achieved among younger audiences. As Lucas puts it in *The Mythology of Star Wars*, the interview with Bill Moyers, "children love power because they are powerless". The first time Luke encounters Vader proves to be a traumatic experience for him, for that is the time when his mentor Obi-Wan chooses to create a ruse that will help the hero and his friends escape. In the process, he chooses to let Vader kill him, affirming that he will become one with the Force and consequently much more powerful.

When Luke faces Vader on the Cloud city of Bespin the way the Sith Lord towers over him, practically hovering, is reminiscent of the way Hamlet's father's ghost confronts his son. Little does Luke know at that moment he, like Hamlet, is confronting his father's ghost, since when Obi-Wan had previously told him Vader had betrayed and murdered his father Anakin, he believed him. However, Luke, unlike the Prince of Denmark, doesn't procrastinate. As soon as he is shown by the Force a future in which his friends suffer at the hands of the despot (in *The Empire Strikes Back*), he immediately flees Dagobah, and rushes to Bespin without even completing his training with Yoda. This vain attempt at rescue would nearly prove fatal for the aspiring Jedi. Impulsiveness seems to be a character trait that both generations of Skywalkers share, however Luke's impetuosity proves the boy is still far from the heroic maturity so desperately yearned for.

The revelation by the Sith lord concerning Luke's parenthood forces the boy to embark on an Oedipal trajectory in which he destroys his father. According to classical Freudian theory the way for Luke to register his Oedipal complex would be via a castration

anxiety. Metaphorically speaking, Luke is terrified by the prospect that Vader might compromise his individuality; only when his Oedipal complex is overcome will Luke be able to identify with his father. Of course the Oedipal complex, as explained in psychoanalytical theory, only fits awkwardly into the *Star Wars* lore, for there is no real psychosexual dispute between father and son for the possession of the mother. Queen Amidala died at child birth, consequently Luke never got to nourish any feelings for her.

The struggle between father and son is quite common in mythology. Consider the Greek example where Zeus came into power by defeating his tyrant father Cronus, one of the first generation of Titans, who devoured Zeus's elder siblings. The future king of the Greek pantheon only managed to escape because his mother Rhea offered her husband a rock which he mistakenly ate, taking it for Zeus. (Cotterell, 1998: 88) Zeus's weapon of choice is the thunderbolt. In the *Star Wars* universe it is transformed into a lightsaber, which confers on its wielder (Jedi knights or Sith lords) not only a way of defending themselves, but also their ideals. In the words of Obi-Wan when he first gives Luke his father's lightsaber "This is the weapon of a Jedi Knight, an elegant weapon of a more civilized time." Kirk says that in traditional Greek (mostly heroic) myths there are some recurrent themes, one of them being the existence of "*Special weapons* (needed to overthrow a particular enemy, cure a wound, etc.)" (Kirk, 1993: 189). It is unquestionable that Luke will need his lightsaber if he is to triumph over many of the obstacles which lay ahead of him including, of course, Vader himself. More interesting still is the fact that it was Anakin himself who built that exact lightsaber which will be passed on to Luke by Ben Kenobi. So the weapon which threatens the life of the villain is reminiscent of a time when he served a different ideal: that of peace and justice, when he was a Jedi.

Galipeau establishes the Jedi as a mixture of two archetypal figures, that of the knight and of the priest (Galipeu, 2001: 29). Curiously, the choice of the name for the Jedi/Sith weapon of choice may be subject to interpretation too. Lightsabers may be used to bring light to a situation otherwise submerged in darkness and in the process confer wisdom on the person who wields them.

Shanti Fader, in the chapter "A Certain Point of View: Lying Jedi, Honest Sith and the Viewers Who Love Them" found in *Star Wars and Philosophy*, focusses on the fact that throughout the saga the Jedi appear to be somewhat uncomfortable with the truth, while the Sith seem to have no shame in sharing it with whoever is around. When

considering Ben's lie to Luke concerning the death of his father, she considers the action could be seen from two different perspectives: "... a way to manipulate him into joining the battle on the Jedi's team...But from another perspective, Obi-wan wasn't trying to manipulate Luke, but to protect him." She defends the idea that "some truths are simply too much to handle for people at an early stage of their intellectual and emotional development (Decker, 2005: 198). She uses the argument posed by Nietzsche that "...we only actually want truths that are pleasant or that help us, and we're quite tolerant of lies that do us no harm" (Decker, 2005: 198). Were it not for Luke's impetuosity, Obi-Wan would have eventually told him his father's sad tale in a way quite different from the way he learned it.

But for this author the reasons or intentions which determine the use of a lie are what really matters. She argues that "...when deception is used to attain noble ends, to assist someone whose awareness and understanding are incomplete, it isn't really deception." (Decker, 2005: 200). Then, following the same line of reasoning, when Obi-Wan lied to Luke about his father, he was simply trying to protect the youth from a painful situation he wasn't quite ready to face, and so the Jedi's moral values seem to remain intact. Having foreseen the danger in which such a vital and sensitive piece of information could place Luke (perhaps even facilitate his transition to the dark side), Obi-Wan chooses misrepresentation as the preferred course of action.

Fader continues by stating that Obi-Wan's remark "from a certain point of view" concerning his failure to share information about Luke's progeny with the boy himself serves as a reminder "not to cling too blindly to a literal, mechanistic truth" (Decker, 2005: 202), under the penalty of becoming intolerant of others' points of view. She then extrapolates that "this is why the Sith are no better for their honesty. Not only is their version of the truth a narrow, limited one, but they speak it only to serve their purposes" (Decker, 2005: 202). The Sith's purposes will always ultimately be the pursuit of power and the infliction of pain on their opponents. Fader ends the chapter with a possible answer as to why the Jedi are forced to tell lies "they lie because truth isn't simple, and because they know that truth told without compassion can be brutal" (Decker, 2005: 204).

Luke, however, according to Joseph Long in the chapter "Religious Pragmatism in the Eyes of Luke Skywalker" which can also be found in *Star Wars and Philosophy* exhibits a sort of religious pragmatism and in the process he manages to align truth with

his beliefs. Such is the case with his firm belief that his father can still be redeemed. While Obi-Wan sees Vader as someone corrupted, “more machine than man”, and in that sense having betrayed and killed his padawan learner and longtime friend Anakin, Luke refuses to acknowledge that reality to be inexpugnable. What is more, it is because of his firm belief that ultimately he manages to save both himself and his father. When in the climatic ending of *Return of the Jedi*, in the battle scene in the throne room of the second Death Star, all seems to be lost for the young Jedi. His refusal to destroy his father and take his place at the side of Emperor Palpatine exacts from the dark robed figure a lethal punishment, brought forth in agonizing lightning, conjured by using the dark side of the Force. Vader is redeemed by his son’s love, and faith that there is still good dwelling inside him; after all, he seems just another pawn in Palpatine’s game.

“Luke’s faith saves him, as Vader kills the Emperor before the Emperor can destroy Luke. But Luke’s faith is not only beneficial for himself. It also saves his father, for his faith turns Anakin back to the Light side of the Force before he dies.”

(Decker, 2005: 210)

Elicited by this sequence of events is one of the driving engines of the *Star Wars* saga: redemption. This author then extrapolates that there are certain circumstances where it is morally justifiable to have faith. Sometimes that faith might even be lifesaving (Decker, 2005: 210).

An example of the popularity this character has maintained for over thirty years, particularly among the younger generations, was when the Washington National Cathedral held a decorative sculpture contest for children in the 80’s. The competition was disseminated primarily through the National Geographic *World Magazine* and the winner for the third place was Christopher Rader with his drawing of Darth Vader. The head of the villain was sculpted by Jay Hall Carpenter, carved by Patrick Jay Plunkett and immortalized as a gargoyle upon the northwest tower of the cathedral. This fact is used by Dan Brown in his novel *The Lost Symbol*, as a peculiar piece in another intricate puzzle for Robert Langdon to solve.

Langdon chuckled. “Luke Skywalker’s dark father? Absolutely. Vader is one of the National Cathedral’s most popular grotesques.” He pointed high into the west towers.

“Tough to see him at night, but he’s there.”

“What in the world is Darth Vader doing on Washington National Cathedral?”

“A contest for kids to carve a gargoyle that depicted the face of evil. Darth won.”

(Brown, 2009: 295-296)



Darth Vader gargoyle situated on the Northwest Tower of the Washington National Cathedral

This contest was held before a whole new generation was introduced to the early days of the Sith lord in the later trilogy. Realizing the appeal the character had for audiences Lucas decided to tell the story of how a worthy Jedi knight turned to the dark side of the Force. And that is what he does, completing the circle of Anakin’s life. In *The Phantom Menace* we are confronted with the humble origins of young Anakin Skywalker, who was a slave no less, together with his mother Shmi.

In Episode I (*The Phantom Menace*) the character is played by young Jake Lloyd. From the very beginning we find out the boy has got a strong personality, for when Queen Amidala (disguised as Padme) asks him if he is a slave, he responds acerbically by saying he is a person. His natural ability to pilot a racing pod is explained by master Qui-Gon Jinn as a sign that the Force is particularly strong in him. Only a personality as reckless as the maverick Jedi would allow the fate of the entire planet of Naboo, and perhaps even of the whole galaxy to be wagered on a pod race. Only just before the beginning of the race does the boy recognize he has never even finished one, much less won. But Qui-Gon’s faith in the boy pays off and he manages to finish first in the Mos Espa pod race, hosted by the crime lord Jabba the Hutt. By resurrecting secondary, but still important characters from

the original trilogy, Lucas manages to create a familiar environment which contributes largely to the rekindling of passions of the original fans of the story.

Qui-Gon believes Anakin is the chosen one, the one who will balance to the Force, or so the legend has it. In this idea of bringing balance to the Force we can see a good example of Taoist wisdom which acknowledges that “everything lies in the seed of its opposite” (Decker, 2005: 79). Curiously the chosen one is not foreseen as eradicating the dark side of the Force forever and allowing the side of good to reign undisputed. Quite on the contrary, the Force acknowledges that both sides are part of the same reality and must coexist, as two sides of the same coin.

When meeting the boy for the first time Yoda immediately recognizes fear, fear for his mother, to be more precise, who was left on Tatooine. He utters a piece of Jedi knowledge which has a prophetic dimension. “Fear is the path to the dark side...fear leads to anger...anger leads to hate...hate leads to suffering.” This will prove to be the destiny of the youth; even at an early age there are already some of his traits that might indicate a flawed personality. He is, from a very early age, guilty of the sin of pride. We can see that in his unjustified confidence in the outcome of the pod race. He was sure he would win, even though he practically got killed the last time he raced. But that doesn’t prove to be the character’s biggest flaw.

The second installment of the prequels, *Attack of the Clones*, sheds light on a darker side of the Jedi, even before he was as Obi-Wan puts it “seduced by the dark side of the Force”. Thus the way the fall from grace starts with actions of unspeakable violence will forever haunt the young warrior. Plagued by images of his suffering mother, Anakin (this time played by Hayden Christensen) immediately jumps to her help, discovering she had been taken hostage by a group of Tusken Raiders (Sand People), indigenous Tatooine dwellers. Barely reaching her in time he only has the opportunity to say goodbye to his mother before she dramatically expires in his arms. Possessed by a murderous rage, the young Jedi exacts his vengeance on the Tusken Raiders, stopping only when every single one of them is dead, including women and children. The unspeakable cruelty of this action isn’t mitigated by the fact that he was acting out of love for his mother.

Richard H. Dees in his chapter “Moral Ambiguity in a Black-and-White Universe” in *Star Wars and Philosophy*, cites the thoughts of philosopher David Hume to establish that “reason plays an important role in morality” (Decker, 2005: 49). Considering this notion, it

is easy to understand that when Anakin loses his self-control his actions become profoundly immoral. "...we could argue that Anakin's reaction is an unwelcome byproduct of a character trait that is generally virtuous. We can still think of Anakin as a good person" (Decker, 2005: 50). This author rejects this notion when comparing the disproportion of Anakin's reaction to his mother's death. He slays everyone he can find in the camp, whether they were innocent or guilty is of no concern to him (Decker, 2005: 50). Grief doesn't seem to suffice to justify Anakin's actions.

When trying to explain himself to Padme, Anakin explains that "They're like animals [Tusken Raiders] and I slaughtered them like animals". "Anakin's capacity to treat people as mere beasts is such a fundamental moral flaw that his capacity for love can't redeem his character" (Decker, 2005: 51). Profoundly shaken by the atrocity he has just committed, Anakin tries to explain to his beloved the reasons for his actions. But even Padme, who loves him, has a difficult time accepting them, even if they were prompted by grief and tragedy. Don't forget that for the first years of his life Anakin had been raised by his mother.

Dees stresses that focusing our attention only on the ones we love may cause blindness to the anguish of others (Decker, 2005: 51). So stating that ultimately love is the reason for his anger, though understandable, it does not begin to justify the horrible acts he commits. "Anakin's murder of the Sand People is, then, in no way morally ambiguous. It's simply the first of Anakin's many future acts of barbarity" (Decker, 2005: 51).

It would be perhaps interesting to establish a parallel between Vader and another epic character, and the ungovernable rages which seems to consume them both. The character I would like to mention is Achilles, in *The Iliad*. Homer's classic is perhaps one of the best known examples where unrestrained passion leads inevitably to tragedy. Similarly, the passion with which Anakin Skywalker lives his life will ultimately consume him. It is Anakin's inability to handle loss, which causes him to become a pawn in Palpatine's quest for ultimate power.

Of course the massacre of the Tusken Raiders does not compare with the massacre of the Jedi younglings in *Revenge of the Sith*. If the first attack left little question as to his flawed nature, the second is probably that which seals his fate as a harbinger of destruction, an epitome of evil. Torn with grief, he is sent by Palpatine to destroy the next generation of Jedi knights, because the tyrant recognizes the threat they might pose to him

in the future. At the same time, order 66 had been issued by the Supreme Chancellor himself, which caused the clones to betray and murder the Jedi whom they had been fighting side by side with, the fact that they were able to carry out this order attests to their completely amoral status.

Fear is the motivation for Anakin's actions. Fear of loss, fear that he won't be powerful enough to protect the ones he loves. Even in the end, in his epic confrontation with his former mentor Obi-Wan, in the lava world of Mustafar, he fails to recognize that his actions are directly responsible for Padmé's death; she literally dies of heartbreak, at childbirth, in this sense assuming the archetypal role of the tragic heroine "I don't know you anymore! Anakin you're breaking my heart. You're going down a path I can't follow." This remark from Padmé comes after Anakin rambles in a deranged manner "I have brought peace to the Republic, I'm more powerful than the Chancellor, I can overthrow him. Together you and I can rule the galaxy". Please notice that Padmé was first shown as the sovereign of Naboo, a queen who was elected by her people and whose mandate expires after four years. She is torn between her personal conviction in a political system based in democracy and her love for Anakin. But ultimately her moral convictions will not allow personal feelings to prevail in the internal struggle she is experiencing, however strong they might be. In the end she will sacrifice herself for her ideals.

Darth Maul: a new breed of villain.

When Lucas returned to the *Star Wars* films in 1999 with *The Phantom Menace*, he had to secure for the place of villain a character which had to rival one of the most iconic characters of the whole saga: Darth Vader. The task of succession was not an easy one. If we have the devious figure of Darth Sidious controlling the villains' master plan, whom aficionados of the films will immediately recognize as a younger version of Emperor Palpatine, Lucas needed the figure of an enforcer, not necessarily of the will of a ruthless emperor, but a Machiavellian figure who plots in the shadows. Even if the special edition of the original trilogy in 1997 brought some new footage, there is no real depth to the characters which were added there. The scenarios are filled with more CGI than the

original releases of the films and you even get to see a short scene when Luke, Ben and the droids get to Mos Eisley on Tatooine where a droid (ASP-7) scatters some smaller droids which seem to have been bothering him. Aside from the comic relief, this new character brings little to the saga in terms of depth or complexity.

So the challenge for Lucas was set: How could he find a character that could compete with the emotionless mask of Vader? Masks are often worn by villains in cinema as an instrument to increase their duplicity as well as the mystery which surrounds them. Take for example two of the icons of horror cinema Jason Voorhees, the killer from *Friday the 13th* series of films and Ghost Face the serial killer in the *Scream* franchise. The Marvel comic book super villain Doctor Doom, created by Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby, making his debut in *The Fantastic Four #5* (cover date July 1962) also sports an iron mask. Alexander Dumas used the iron mask to imprison Louis XIV's twin brother in the last of the d'Artagnan Romances *The Vicomte of Bragelonne: Ten Years Later* which was preceded by *The Three Musketeers* and *Twenty Years After*. If Lucas wasn't exactly original in the introduction of a masked villain, one must at least remember that masks do sometimes hide innocents.

The direction Lucas took was an entirely different one. He replaced the metal mask for a horned head covered with black and red tattoos in the character of Darth Maul. In the interview Lucas gave to Bill Moyers in 1999, *The Mythology of Star Wars*, when questioned by Moyers about the similarity of Darth Maul to Satan, Lucas answers that he had searched previous representations of evil, not only Christian, but also Greek and in many of these representations of Evil the characters had horns. He then states the emotion he's trying to transmit is fear. Maul is a representation of evil for all of us and the audiences get to witness the emotions which Darth Maul experiences. Even with heavy makeup Ray Park manages to show anger, violence and unconditional dedication to the Sith, as he bears his teeth in a scowl destined to bring fear to his opponents.

Reynolds says that Darth Maul focuses "...on physical and tactical abilities, serves his master obediently, believing that his own time for strategic wisdom and eventual domination will come. His face is tattooed with symbols giving evidence of his complete dedication to discipline in the dark side." (Reynolds, 2006: 51). The strength of the character resides in his utter ruthlessness and hatred. Scottish actor and martial arts expert Ray Park really brought to life the physical side of the character. Lucas was reportedly so

impressed by the physical prowess of the actor he gave him freedom to develop his own choreography for the fighting sequences.

At lot had changed, cinematically speaking, since the final duel of Luke and Vader at the end of *Return of the Jedi*. Audiences were expecting something new, fresh and full of visual impact, and Ray Park made sure that was exactly what they got. The dueling lightsaber sequences in *The Phantom Menace* are full of kinetic ferocity. The double-edged lightsaber Maul so masterfully wields in the Theed Generator Complex, the site where his final battle with Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi takes place, is something never before seen in the *Star Wars* universe, and the Sith apprentice proves more than a match for the Jedi master and his Padawan learner. “Traditionally used as a training device, the double-edged lightsaber can be much more dangerous for its wielder than an enemy. In the hands of Darth Maul, however, it becomes a whirling vortex of lethal energy” (Reynolds, 2006: 51). John Williams’s music *Duel of the Fates*, contributes to the epic quality of the confrontation which is about to occur.

The character of Toad (also played by Ray Park) in Bryan Singer’s *The X-Men* (2000), duplicates with a leather pipe one of the movements Darth Maul performs in *The Phantom Menace* as a tribute to the Sith apprentice. But the talent the actor demonstrates for perfectly timed action sequences is perhaps better shown in Stephen Sommers’s *GI JOE, The Rise of Cobra* (2009) playing Larry Hama’s iconic character of Snake Eyes. The Sith lord’s over-confidence ultimately causes his downfall. After having mortally speared the Jedi master Qui-Gon Jinn and having gained considerable tactical advantage over his Padawan, Obi-Wan Kenobi (who is hanging unarmed on the border of the abyss) Maul takes his time and chooses to tease his opponent in Bond-villain cliché style, instead of seizing the opportunity to finish the confrontation. Kenobi takes the opportunity to summon the Force and make his master’s lightsaber fly to his hand at the same time as he somersaults over the Sith and delivers a mortal blow which, effectively cuts his opponent in half and sends him plummeting into the abyss. One can clearly establish a parallel with the Christian myth of the fall of Lucifer from heaven; much like the fallen angel, Maul displays an overwhelming amount of pride.

In spite of the ferociousness the character exhibits and the superior battle skills demonstrated, the Sith apprentice fails because he’s unable to recognize the threat posed by Kenobi. He pays with his life for his momentary lapse of concentration leaving Yoda and

Mace Windu to ponder at the end of *The Phantom Menace* the origin and identity of the mysterious attacker.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that the *Star Wars* saga of films rests on a reapplication of myth. A glance at different approaches to myth reveals the various points of contact between the films and myth. When considering William Robertson Smith's myth-ritualistic theory, which establishes an intimate connection between myth and ritual, we can understand how ritual is present in *Star Wars*. The Jedi knights are part of an order which is ruled by ritual, where its members are compelled to dress alike and abandon the idea of having a family in order to better serve their order (much like several religious orders on Earth). For a child to enter the order as a Padawan learner, ritualistic tests are made in order to determine if they are in tune with the mystical notion of the Force.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, myth can also be perceived as an alternative way of addressing history. When considered as poetic truth, myth shapes human acts and the motives which are inherent to them in a much more Manichean manner, thus depriving them of their complexity. If there were just one word to describe Lucas's universe it would most certainly be Manichean. Reading *Star Wars* in the aftermath of the Vietnam War (the first film was released in 1977), it can be perceived as an attempt to bring closure to this episode of American history in which moral positions were at best murky. The Rebels appear to stand for democracy against the dictatorship of Palpatine's galactic Empire. Thus, the story is distanced from America, a superior technological superpower, trying to impose its will on a more technologically underdeveloped foe. Lucas manages to fudge recent history with an alternative reading of events; like in *The Deer Hunter* (1978), it is one which passes one's transgressions off onto one's enemies. In this context, the question of why and how myth arises (its origin) may well be addressed. *Star Wars* appeared in the social and political maelstrom of American history following the end of the Vietnam War. Indeed Kapell entertains the idea that the Empire could actually represent a projected version of America itself (Kapell, 2006: 38). In exploring this notion one might find an answer to the second question frequently raised when addressing myth. That question is what its function is and is concerned with answering why and how myth endures. Here one might like to speculate on America's need for healing, rewriting political events in such a way as to leave few doubts as to its ethical position on foreign policy. The third area of

speculation when studying myth is its subject matter? In the case of *Star Wars* one can argue that in a symbolical way part of it is recent Cold War history. In fact, politics represent a strong central trope in the narrative, dictatorships are addressed in an innovative way in the film. The struggle of the Rebels against the Empire in the first trilogy, and the resurgence of that same Empire in the later trilogy are central to the story. At the core of this tyrannical regime lies “a leader of leaders who rule by power” (Hanson, 2002: 32). Usually this power is enforced by fear. There are several political regimes which have prospered through the dissemination of a policy of fear, from Imperial Rome to more recently the Nazis, these being the opposite of what democracy stands for, a system where ultimately power belongs to the people and governments are supposed to serve them, not the other way around. “The Rebel Alliance represents the will of the people not to tolerate a life of fear” (Hanson, 2002: 32) When Hanson recognizes the Rebels as archetypal characters who embody free will and a clear denial of the manipulative behavior of a tyrannical Emperor, he acknowledges them as “immediate inspiration for the issues that a society defending its freedom must face” (Hanson, 2002: 33).

The archetypal characters featured in the saga hold a trait which is often explored in myth: heroism. From early myths which go back to ancient Greece, stories of heroes are told. Joseph Campbell’s work In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was very influential for Lucas in the construction of his *Star Wars* saga. Campbell reorganizes the classical hero myth paradigm.

“The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (Segal, 2004: 104).

These are the stages that Luke goes through in the first trilogy. From a forced separation from his uncle and aunt in Tatooine, to the process of initiation which will lead him to achieve the status of Jedi knight and finally to the return, following Campbell’s theory, not to reality as he knew it, but to an improved version of it (in this case free from the clutches of the evil Empire).

Lucas manages the unlikely feat of establishing the coexistence of science and myth. Technological scenarios such as the Death Star are challenged by the spiritual notion of the Force. Contrary to belief that myth proves to be a “victim of the process of secularization

that constitutes modernity” (Segal, 2004: 13) he integrates these two elements in his very own fantastical universe. If we consider that myth shares many of the views and values of theology, it is only natural that science will offer an alternate perception of the world; one of the imperial officers in the Death Star in *Star Wars* deems Vader’s devotion to the old religion “pitiful”. One of the arguments which could be used to defend this coexistence between science and myth is that the subject matter of myth (in this case the Force) seems not to be of the physical world, this way preventing direct confrontation with science (even if Han Solo finds it difficult to comprehend a notion which isn’t physically manifest).

When Rudolf Bultmann “demythologizes” myth and in so doing offers not a literal reading of myth but a symbolic one, his theory points to the unveiling of the multiplicity of symbolic readings which the Force can have. Myth becomes a subjective experience of the world. For Mircea Eliade myth postulates regeneration; through myth you find God. When Luke is on board the Millennium Falcon, in *Star Wars*, and Ben is trying to teach him how to use a lightsaber, while wearing a “blast shield” helmet which obstructs his vision, at first he fails miserably. Only when Luke opens himself to belief does he establish contact with the spiritual notion of the Force.

By depicting myth as a communal experience Jacob Arlow opens a completely different avenue to its study. Centering his study of myth on a psychological approach he establishes that myth provides “psychic integration” in society (Arlow, 1961: 375). The cinematic experience can prove to be a vehicle for integration into a larger group, in this manner contributing to socialization. Cinema frequently holds a mythical dimension due to the issues it deals with from the eternal struggle of good vs. evil, to maidens who need rescuing or terrible dragons which protect unspeakable treasures. “Plays, books, and films are like myths because they reveal the existence of another, often earlier world alongside the everyday one – a world of extraordinary figures and events akin to those found in traditional myths.” (Segal, 2004: 56-57). *Star Wars* is most certainly an example of cinema enacting a rejection of lived experience and of escape to an alternative dimension where myth is a deeply felt presence.

According to Michael J. Hanson, “documentation of contemporary culture is therefore a function of myth” (Hanson, 2002: 31). He concludes this by underlining the fact that it was common for ancient Greeks to know about the Trojan War, not through military history, but by reading Homer’s *Odyssey*. (Hanson, 2002: 31). “Myths can possess

significance through their structure, which may unconsciously represent structural elements in the society from which they originate or typical behavioristic attitudes of the myth-makers themselves” (Kirk, 1993: 252). Even though the story narrated in *Star Wars* is set in the fairy tale world of “a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away”, many echoes of our society are still redolent in it.

The *Star Wars* saga addresses the theme of human rights and equality between different species. There, the Empire is seen as unidimensional in the fact that it’s entirely composed of humans, and male humans at that. In contrast, one of the Rebel leaders is Mon Mothma, played by Caroline Blakiston in *Return of the Jedi* and Genevieve O’Riley in *Revenge of the Sith*. The Rebels also comprise in their ranks many different species, thus appealing to our spirit of tolerance and multiculturalism. The Jedi Council in the later trilogy seems to be the perfect example of a harmonious relationship which is established between several species which show the same sensitivity towards the Force. Chewbacca is one of the heroes of the films despite being a Wookie (a sort of two-legged Rin Tin Tin). Ultimately the close collaboration of different species (*Star Wars*’s “*E Pluribus Unum*”) proves critical for the overthrow of the tyrannical dictatorship of the Empire, even if the latter is equipped with superior technology and firepower.

The films also comment on the growing dependence of society on technology, seeming to consider it an ultimate goal, not that Lucas views technology as constitutive of either good or evil. Technology is only as good as how it is used by society. The rebels also use technology, namely droids, but the way they treat their droids is different from that of the Empire. R2-D2 and C-3P0 are seen as equals by the Rebels, integral to their war effort, while the Empire practically enslaves their droids, to say nothing of the way Jabba treats his, or the fact that Wuher, the bartender at the Mos Eisley cantina in *Star Wars*, refuses entrance to R2-D2 and C-3P0 in his establishment.

Lucas envisions spirituality as a solution for an overly mechanized world, in which the human factor is frequently discredited. When comparing two of the environments recreated in the filmic saga, the Death Star and the planet of Dagobah, one notices that the sterile, mechanical environment that the Imperial space station provides is destined for destruction in spite of its superior technological development. In fact, in *Star Wars* the Empire was actually able to create a self-sustaining planet (the first time Han Solo sees the space station he remarks that it is too big, so it must be a small moon). Man has rivaled

God in the generation of these technologically driven worlds. But the difference is that the Death Star will be used as a weapon, one which is powerful enough to destroy an entire planet with a single blast of its huge laser canon. It is symptomatic that this tremendous machine is destroyed by Luke's direct communion with the Force. After all, it is the Force which guides his hand when he fires the torpedo which causes the chain reaction that eventually destroys the behemoth. What we witness here is a recreation of the biblical theme of David vs. Goliath, where through spiritual illumination the underdog manages to turn the tables and defeat his more powerful opponent. Diametrically opposed to this environment, we have the marshland world of Dagobah, which is brimming with life. The planet which was chosen by Jedi master Yoda to hide after the Jedi purge which took place in *Revenge of the Sith*. It is here that the 800-year-old Jedi lives in a Spartan way, perfectly in communion with nature, through the use of the Force. I believe the point Lucas is trying to make is that when technology is void of human utility it becomes sterile. Its purpose must always be to better human existence.

Considering the contribution of psychology to the study of myth, particularly that of Carl Gustav Jung, who approximates myth to dream, the premise I defend in this thesis is that *Star Wars* has facilitated dreaming for several generations of its audiences. However, one should not neglect one of the crucial points made in the saga. The new technological myth Lucas constructs both celebrates our love of the modern and the mechanical but it also draws our attention to the risks inherent in too uncritical an acceptance of the tools and toys of power.

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